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*MATTHEW AUSTIN.*¹

BY W. E. NORRIS.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE DRAWBACKS OF PHILANTHROPY.

THE feeling of which Lilian Murray had spoken with some apprehension was experienced to the full by Matthew after she had left Wilverton and he had fallen back into the ordinary routine of his daily life. The events of the preceding week hardly seemed real to him; he had difficulty in believing that he was in sober earnest engaged to be married to the girl whom he had for so long been satisfied, or almost satisfied, to love without hope of return or reward. The engagement, to be sure, was but provisional and contingent; he frequently had to remind himself of that, lest he should lapse from scepticism into over-credulity; still the fact remained that one of the contracting parties did not so regard it, and he was clearly bound to respect her wishes in the matter of making the same known to a few sympathetic persons.

Accordingly, he wrote to Leonard Jerome, upon whose sympathy, to tell the truth, he did not count with implicit confidence, and he was agreeably surprised to receive by return of post a very hearty letter of congratulation from his young friend. Leonard was in London and thought it likely that he would remain there, off and on, for some months to come. He was once more, to use his own expression, 'as fit as a fiddle,' he was participating in the many forms of diversion which a community devoted rather to the development of physical than of mental perfection

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provides for its gilded youth, and he humbly trusted that his uncle would not be seized with any burning desire to see him again yet awhile. 'Though I should like well enough to see *you* and have a chat,' he added considerably. 'But you are sure to be coming up to town by-and-by, now that you have such a powerful magnet to attract you. Possibly I may come across Lady Sara and her fair daughter somewhere or other, and if I do, I shall not fail to tell them that in my opinion they are uncommonly lucky people. Don't you be afraid of being cut out. It is all right and highly magnanimous on your part to stand aside until the end of the season; but unless I am much mistaken in Miss Murray she knows her own mind as well as anybody. Besides, there aren't such an awful lot of real good fellows about, and to the best of my belief there is only one Matthew Austin.'

Well, that was satisfactory: it was to be hoped that the other friends whom Matthew had been specially instructed to inform of his engagement would take the news in a similar spirit of cordiality. For reasons to which he was unable to give any definite name, Matthew felt extremely reluctant to make confession to the Frere family; but there was no need for him to trouble himself about the matter, because they had heard the whole story some days before he drove out to Hayes Park with the intention of enlightening them. By what means is news, true and false, promulgated with such amazing rapidity? Nobody seems to know whence the Mrs. Jenningses derive their information; but there is no city, town, or village so ill provided for as to lack a Mrs. Jennings, and the Mrs. Jennings of Wilverton was in a position to state precisely what were the conditions under which the young doctor had been permitted to style himself Miss Murray's *fiancé*. Mrs. Frere, therefore, was quite ready with ungrudging felicitations, supplemented by warnings which only she knew how to offer without a shade of offensiveness.

'I shall rejoice for your sake if it does come off,' she said frankly, 'because I think the girl is nice, and she is so marvelously pretty that one would have to forgive her even if she wasn't nice. But considering how young she is and how queer some of her mother's people have been, I am sure you are quite right to leave the question open for the present. It will be so much more comfortable for you, in case of any hitch occurring, to be able to say that you anticipated it! And, if I were you, I *would* anticipate it. I always anticipate evil myself, and it is wonderful how

seldom I am disappointed. Those new tea-roses, for instance : it was rather disgusting that every single one of them should die ; but I had the comfort of knowing that I had never from the first expected them to thrive in that soil.'

Anne, who had been equally friendly, though less outspoken, in her reception of Matthew's tidings, interrupted these premature efforts at consolation.

'Do allow Mr. Austin credit for knowing better than to plant his roses where they can't be expected to thrive,' said she, laughing. 'I don't believe he anticipates any hitch at all, and I am sure there is no reason why his friends should.'

Anne was so pleasant and cheerful and spoke with so much kindness about Lilian that Matthew felt sincerely grateful to her ; although, upon reflection, he scarcely knew what cause he had for particular gratitude. No doubt those silly children had said some silly things to her, but it was not to be supposed that she could feel even remotely aggrieved by the downfall of their castle in the air.

Nevertheless, her manner, in talking to him, had undergone a certain change, of which he became more sensible as time went on. Being now much less busy than he had been during the winter, he was able to see his friends with greater frequency, and to the Frere family he was always a welcome visitor. Consequently, he found himself pretty often at Hayes Park ; and so it was that Anne, who no longer avoided his society, began to show herself to him under a new aspect. Her capricious moods, her alternations between shyness and expansiveness were things of the past ; she always seemed pleased to see him and never forgot to inquire what news he had from London ; but he had ceased to be her confidant. She made him aware of that in various ways, and he could not help suspecting that he had fallen a little in her esteem. Possibly she may have thought it rather silly of him to fix his affections upon a girl so much younger than himself and so unlikely to develop into the contented wife of a rural practitioner. Of Spencer she showed a marked reluctance to speak. In answer to his questions, she said that she occasionally heard from her brother and hoped all was going on well ; but the obligation under which she had been laid by Matthew's intervention was so evidently burdensome to her that he felt a delicacy about alluding to the subject.

One morning, however, the subject was brought to his notice in a manner which, if it did not necessitate immediate communi-

cation with Anne, appeared to render prompt action on his part imperative. Sir Godfrey, whose letter was dated from the House of Commons and was couched in terms of injured remonstrance, wrote to say that he had just been made the recipient of exceedingly unpleasant information by Colonel Egerton.

'As far as I can make out, your *protégé* has been appropriating money belonging to the sergeants' mess. At any rate, a matter of fifty pounds is said to be missing, the man is under arrest, and Colonel Egerton seems to think he is doing me a favour by saying that the worst consequences may yet be averted if the deficit is made good within the next thirty-six hours. What leads him to suppose that I shall pay up a considerable sum for the benefit of a rascal whom I never saw in my life, but whom I have good-naturedly gone out of my way to befriend, I am at a loss to imagine. Certainly I shall do no such thing, and I much regret that your representations induced me to exert myself on behalf of so undeserving a person. I think it right to tell you of what has occurred; but if you move in the matter—beyond, perhaps, informing the man's relations—you will, in my opinion, be extremely ill-advised. I ought, perhaps, to mention that the 22nd Lancers are at present quartered at Lowcester; but of that you are probably already aware.'

Matthew sighed and unlocked his money-box to see whether he had as much as fifty pounds in hand. Fortunately or unfortunately, that amount was forthcoming, and his next act was to study 'Bradshaw,' with the result that he discovered a train, starting in about two hours' time, which would land him at Lowcester before nightfall. He had not the slightest doubt or hesitation as to the course which it behoved him to pursue. Ill-advised it might be, in the abstract, to fly to the aid of a hopeless young ne'er-do-well, who was probably a thief into the bargain, but it was altogether out of the question that Miss Frere's brother should be committed for trial and perhaps sentenced to penal servitude.

'All the same,' reflected Matthew ruefully, 'I am afraid the fellow has ruined himself. It is all very fine to make restitution, but I don't see how they are going to get over the fact of the arrest or how he can possibly be recommended for a commission after such an episode. Dear me, what a perverse world it is, and how uncalled for half the catastrophes that take place in it seem to be! It would have been so easy, one would have thought, to steer clear of criminal offences for one year! But the whole

question, I suppose, is one of temptation and adequate power of resistance.'

That, no doubt, is the whole question, and a deeply discouraging one it is to ruminate upon. To give his thoughts a pleasanter turn, Matthew reverted to a long letter from Lilian which he had perused before opening his brother's, and which seemed to show that her powers of resistance, so far, were all that could be desired. She had passed through the formidable ceremony of presentation, she had been to half a dozen balls and was going to at least half a dozen more, engagements of every kind were multiplying, 'and I loathe it all!' she declared. 'It is quite as bad as I thought it would be—worse, in some ways—and my only wish is to get to the end of it. Can you look three months ahead? I can't; though I am always trying. I feel like Eurydice in the lower regions, and I know the last thing you would ever think of doing would be to come and play Orpheus to me. However, I shall emerge of my own accord when the time comes; you need have no fears on that score.'

It was in this strain that she habitually wrote, and many lovers would have detected an undertone of uneasiness in it. Why protest so much? Why anathematise what, after all, must needs be novel and exciting to every young girl? Lilian would have been more convincing if she had been less vehement. But Matthew was too loyal to seek for symptoms of disloyalty. Moreover, he said to himself that this preliminary petulance would soon give way to a more reasonable frame of mind. He did not want Lilian to be disgusted with the fashionable world, though of course he could not wish her to become enamoured of it.

Meanwhile, he had to pack up some clothes and make a few arrangements, because it was certain that he could not count upon being back before the following afternoon. There was nothing, he found, to prevent him from absenting himself for four and twenty hours, and, having told the servants that he had been unexpectedly called away—an incident which was not so uncommon as to give rise to conjecture—he set forth on his tedious cross-country railway journey.

Lowcester, a decorous, somnolent cathedral city, upon the outskirts of which the cavalry barracks were situated, boasted, as he was informed by a friendly porter, of two very excellent hotels. The porter was unwilling to draw invidious distinctions, but went so far as to say that he believed the Rose and Crown to be rather

more extensively patronised by the nobility and gentry than the Golden Lion. Matthew therefore had himself and his modest belongings conveyed to the Rose and Crown, where he was shown into a vast, mouldy-smelling bedroom and was told that, by giving due notice, he could have anything he liked for dinner. He replied that, under those circumstances, he would have anything that the cook liked to give him; after which he requested to be furnished with Colonel Egerton's address. Rather to his surprise, the landlord denied all knowledge of such a person, remarking, with an air of lofty superiority, that he had never had any personal dealings with 'the military.' It is necessary to visit a country town, dominated by clerical influence, in order to arrive at any idea of the low esteem in which Her Majesty's forces are held by a section of Her Majesty's subjects. However, some less haughty and exclusive individual—possibly the ostler—was discovered about the premises, from whom it was ascertained that Colonel Egerton and his family resided at The White Lodge, a quarter of a mile or so away.

'Bother his family!' thought Matthew, as, in pursuance of instructions, he walked along the grass-grown High Street towards the suburb where Colonel Egerton had taken up his temporary abode; 'I never thought of his being a married man, and I would a little rather not have this surreptitious visit of mine talked about by inquisitive ladies. I suppose he will grant me a private audience, though, if I say I have come upon business.'

There was the less difficulty about that because Colonel Egerton's wife and daughters happened to be smart personages who had gone up to London for the season, leaving the head of the family to shift for himself at the post of duty during their absence. The Colonel, a dapper little good-humoured man, with a waxed grey moustache, stepped out into the hall, after Matthew's card had been carried to him, and shook his visitor cordially by the hand.

'Very glad to see you,' said he; 'I know what has brought you here; I've heard of the kind interest that you have taken in that confounded young jackanapes.'

He drew Matthew into the spacious, comfortably-furnished smoking-room which he was inhabiting during his period of enforced bachelorhood, pushed a box of cigars across the table, lighted one himself, sank into an easy chair, and began:

'Well, now, I had better tell you at once, Mr. Austin, that the

money will have to be paid. I'm ready to do what I can, but unless the money is forthcoming, I shall be powerless.'

'Oh, I have brought the money,' said Matthew.

'You have, eh? Has his father been told, then?'

'Well, no. For many reasons, it would not have been advisable to tell his father.'

'Then who—but that's none of my business, you'll say. H'm!—well, if the amount missing is made good in time, nothing more need be said about it, and I can simply try the fellow on a charge of drunkenness and insubordination, for which he has been placed under arrest. Bad enough, of course, but a flea-bite compared with the other.'

'Drunkenness and insubordination!' echoed Matthew, in dismay.

'Oh, Lord, yes! your friend has been distinguishing himself, I can tell you. Wanted to be dismissed from the service, I dare say, and couldn't think of any better means than that of effecting his object. Always the way with these beggars!—sooner or later they're bound to get desperate and play Old Harry!'

'But I should have thought that he had the best of reasons for being anything but desperate just now.'

'Ah, I'm not so sure of that. If you or I had misappropriated money and didn't see our way to replace it, we should be rather near desperation, I suppose. Mind, I know nothing of this officially; I only learnt by a side-wind what was bound to come out at the court-martial, and that was why I wired to Sir Godfrey. Therefore, anything that I may tell you about young Frere—for I presume you haven't heard his story and would like to hear it?—must be regarded as strictly confidential, please.'

'I quite understand that,' answered Matthew, 'and I should certainly like to hear what has happened. I may say that I have no personal acquaintance with the culprit, although I know his people very well.'

Colonel Egerton glanced at the disinterested friend of the family with a half-humorous, half-compassionate twinkle in his eye. No doubt he was thinking to himself, 'Either this man is a misguided philanthropist or else he is in love with one of Frere's sisters.' So clever does a middle-aged man of the world and experienced commander of a regiment become. But if Mr. Austin liked to expend fifty pounds in rescuing a malefactor from the clutches of justice, that, after all, was Mr. Austin's affair; so the

Colonel cleared his voice and embarked upon his succinct narrative without irrelevant comments.

‘I need hardly tell you that there’s a woman in the business; I never knew a bad job yet but a woman was connected with it in some way or other, and Frere has been getting into scrapes of that kind ever since he did my regiment the honour to enlist in it. There is no occasion to trouble you with bygone histories, but I dare say you can guess the sort of troubles that are apt to arise when you have a good-looking, swaggering young sergeant, whom everybody knows to be a gentleman and who, I suspect, is a little bit given to romancing about his rank and prospects and so forth. The cause of the present calamity is a certain Mrs. Johnson, or Jackson, or Thompson—hanged if I remember the woman’s name!—a vulgar little over-dressed, yellow-haired widow, whom several of our young fellows have been running after. She is said to be well off—whether truly or untruly I’m sure I can’t say. She has chosen to take up Frere and make much of him; which, as you may imagine, has brought about a good deal of unpleasantness. There is some story about a jewelled bangle that he gave her, and about her wearing it ostentatiously at a race-meeting here the other day. Naturally, he couldn’t have paid for it, and from what I hear, I fancy she must have run him into debt also for flowers and bonbons and other rubbish. The upshot of it all, I have no doubt, was that, being hardly pressed and having, unfortunately, access to money which didn’t belong to him, he went to the races and failed to back winners. Anyhow, it was after the races that he was found reeling about the streets, and he wasn’t got back to barracks without a scuffle, confound him! Now, have I made the situation clear to you?’

‘As clear as is necessary, I think,’ answered Matthew, with a mournful grimace. ‘I suppose he may say good-bye to his chance of a commission after this?’

The colonel jerked up his shoulders. ‘What can we do?’ he asked. ‘He has no defence, and discipline must be maintained. I tell you frankly that if I were his father, I should purchase his discharge; I don’t believe he will ever do any good at soldiering now. One is sorry, of course, but one has done one’s best. You would like to see him, I suppose?’

‘Yes, I had better see him, if I may,’ answered Matthew, without much alacrity. ‘Where is he?—in solitary confinement?’

‘No, he’s in hospital at present—either sick or malingering.

I'll tell you what, Mr. Austin ; if you'll do me the favour to dine with me at our mess to-night—I can't ask you to dine here, because my wife is away, and a kitchen-maid is considered good enough for the likes of me in her absence—I'll introduce you to Bowker, our medico, who will arrange for you to have a talk with the man either to-night or to-morrow morning.'

Matthew thanked the hospitable colonel, but begged to be excused. He was anxious, he said, to conceal the fact of his visit to Lowcester, if possible, and the fewer people who were made aware of it the better he would be pleased.

'All right,' answered Colonel Egerton, nodding good-naturedly ; 'I understand. I'll say a word to Bowker, then, and he'll look you up the first thing in the morning. Very good fellow, Bowker, and no chatterbox. Now, Mr. Austin, I don't want to meddle with what doesn't concern me, but there is just one thing that I should like to say. Somebody, of course, has been and is helping Frere out with money, and I gather from what you tell me that it isn't his father. Well, I should strongly advise that person to cut off the supplies. He is one of those happy-go-lucky fellows who will take all he can get and never stop to say thank you. Sooner or later, the cost of supporting him must needs fall upon his father, and there's nothing to be gained by mystery and postponement. If he were my son, I should make him a small annual allowance, upon the condition that he sailed at once for Australia and stayed there. He'll never keep out of trouble in this country, you may depend upon it.'

'Thank you,' answered Matthew ; 'you are probably right, and I will think over what you have said. All hope of a commission must be abandoned, I presume ?'

'Oh, I don't say that he might not eventually get his commission, if he were to turn over a new leaf ; but it stands to reason that he would have to wait a longish time for it, and I confess that I shouldn't feel at all sanguine on his behalf.'

There was nothing more to be said, and Matthew went away with a strong impression upon his mind that he was about to make a very unprofitable, though unavoidable, investment.

CHAPTER XVIII.

AN IMPENITENT SINNER.

MATTHEW had not finished his breakfast, on the following morning, when his military colleague called, in obedience to instructions, to conduct him to the hospital. There was very little to be got out of this tall, spare, saturnine personage, who appeared to merit the character given him by his colonel for being no chatter-box.

‘Nothing of consequence,’ he said, in reply to Matthew’s inquiries. ‘Effects of drink and a shock, that’s all. Usual thing—nervous system all to pieces.’

‘But I understand that he doesn’t drink habitually,’ Matthew said.

The taciturn Bowker made no answer until the remark had been repeated, when he observed, ‘Well, you can look at him and form your own opinion. As a matter of fact, he is fit to go back to the cells; but I have kept him on the sick-list because—’ He shrugged his shoulders slightly by way of completing the sentence.

On the road to the hospital Matthew thought it best to say a word or two upon a subject as to which his companion manifested no impertinent curiosity.

‘I suppose you are acquainted with the circumstances?’ he began.

‘Yes, I have heard something, and the Colonel spoke to me last night. Glad to hear you have brought the money. I was to tell you that if you would hand it over to me, it should be placed where it ought to be. You can’t very well give it to the man himself, you see.’

‘I suppose not,’ Matthew agreed. ‘Here are ten five-pound notes, then, if you will kindly take charge of them. May I ask what punishment is likely to be inflicted upon him for the minor offence?’

‘Oh, they’ll have to reduce him to the ranks, I should say. Lucky fellow to get off so cheap!’

‘Yes—only that means something very like ruin in his case, I am afraid.’

‘Well, I take it that he was practically ruined some time ago,

Bound to go to the deuce sooner or later; men of that stamp invariably do. Can't afford to knock themselves about like the average Tommy—haven't the stamina.'

After a long pause, Matthew asked, 'Is he liked in the regiment?'

'I believe the men rather like him; he is a fine horseman and he knows how to use his fists. But he has made himself obnoxious to the officers in more ways than one. Pleasant fellow, too, in some respects; glad he is to escape the worst consequences of his tomfoolery.'

Tomfoolery seemed a lenient term to apply to the misdeeds of which Spencer Frere had presumably been guilty; yet when Matthew was brought face to face with the culprit, he almost believed it to be appropriate. For this long-legged, fair-complexioned fellow, in hospital clothes, who was found sitting on a sunny bench, with his back turned to the great, bare building, really did not look much like a hardened sinner. His manner, it is true, was defiant, not to say offensive; but that, Matthew thought, was only natural under the circumstances. Courage, the one good quality which sometimes survives self-respect, is apt to manifest itself after offensive fashions when left to stand alone.

'So you are Anne's friend the doctor,' said he, after the other doctor had discreetly withdrawn out of earshot. 'Very good of you to take all this trouble, I'm sure; but one must presume that you have your reasons. And you have brought the missing money with you, old Bowker tells me.'

'Yes; it will be all right, as far as the money is concerned,' Matthew answered, seating himself beside the subject of his benevolence, and endeavouring, by a sidelong scrutiny, to take his measure.

'Ah!—well, I didn't ask for it, you know, but I won't deny that I feel a little relieved. It's hard lines on poor old Anne to have to pay up fifty quid, though. How the dickens she managed to raise it is what beats me! She'll have to go tick for the rest of the year, I expect.'

'You might have thought of that before, might you not?' said Matthew, who had no wish to proclaim himself as Spencer's benefactor.

'I might—as you very sagaciously remark. But the unfortunate thing about me is that I am not much in the habit of thinking. By the way, I don't suppose for a moment that you'll

believe me, but I didn't steal that money. At all events, I didn't steal it intentionally, and what has become of it I know no more than the man in the moon.'

'Since you tell me so, I believe you,' answered Matthew.

'The deuce you do! You must be a precious sight more credulous than doctors in general, then. My experience is that doctors, as a rule, won't believe you on your oath. Look at old Bowker, for instance, who will have it that I'm an habitual drunkard. As if I should mind owning to that, supposing it were true! All the same, it happens to be true that I'm not a thief, in the common sense of the word. I went to the races, not knowing how much I had in my pocket, backed the wrong ones, returned to barracks without a sixpence, and it wasn't until then that I found out what I had done.'

Well, this might be the truth; but certainly a robust faith was required in order to accept such an explanation of the disappearance of fifty pounds from the possession of a non-commissioned officer who, in all probability, could seldom have had fifty shillings to play with. Spencer must have felt that his story was a lame one, for presently he added, with a laugh:

'I believe I was robbed—if that improves matters. I'm sure I couldn't have staked the lot. But the fact is that I have never had any head for figures, and so I told those fellows when they insisted upon intrusting me with the mess-money. They ought never to have done such a thing.'

Matthew did not inquire how and why money belonging to the sergeants' mess had come to be in the pocket of the man with no head for figures at a race-meeting; he merely observed: 'Of course it would have been easy enough for any one to rob you while you were under the influence of liquor.'

'Perfectly easy. As far as that goes, there isn't any very great difficulty about robbing me even when I am sober. Well, it's useless to cry over spilt milk, but, as matters have turned out, I wish I had allowed them to arrest me without a row.'

'I wish with all my heart that you had. It is most unlucky.'

'Very unlucky indeed for me; I don't know that *you* have any special reason for pulling a long face over it. That is, unless you have already begun to associate yourself with the misfortunes of the family.' He stretched out his legs and indulged in a low laugh which was evidently intended to be insolent. 'The family is not looking up,' he resumed. 'I don't wish to breathe a word

against your useful and admirable profession, but there was a time, not so very long ago, when we should have thought our woman-kind entitled to choose their husbands from a rather more exalted class.'

Matthew kept his temper. 'I am not going to quarrel with you,' said he good-humouredly; 'please make up your mind to that, and at the same time let me assure you that your family is in no danger of disgracing itself by a misalliance, so far as I am concerned. There is nothing of the kind that you imagine between your sister and me.'

'Really? Then why in the world are you here, I wonder?'

'Well, for a variety of reasons. Chiefly, I suppose, because somebody had to come, and because no one else happened to be available. I think I may venture to describe myself as your sister's friend, and it would simplify matters if you would accept me in that capacity. I should be very glad to act as your friend also, if I could see any way in which my friendship was likely to be of service to you; but, frankly speaking, I don't just at present.'

For a moment Spencer Frere looked almost ashamed of himself; but he had resumed his previous air of bravado before he returned: 'Oh, I'm much indebted to you, as it is. I know you have put yourself out to get the promise of a commission for me, and you must be wishing by this time that you had left the thing alone. Especially as you disclaim the only motive which, I should have thought, might account for your behaviour. I am sorry that you saw fit to interest yourself in so worthless a specimen of humanity, but—well, I never requested you to do so, did I?'

No reply was forthcoming to this pertinent or impertinent query; but after a pause of some moments, Matthew asked abruptly: 'How long have you been in the habit of taking morphia?'

His neighbour started and gave a low whistle. 'Now how the deuce,' he exclaimed, 'did you know that I have been taking morphia? Bowker never thought of that, though he was the first man to administer it to me.'

'I didn't know for certain; nobody could by looking at you, and of course it must be some days since you had your last dose. But there are several trifling symptoms which might possibly be due to that cause, and it is very evident to me that you have

never been a tippler. Now, Frere, you had better take my word, as that of a medical man, for it that you must break yourself of this habit. It can hardly be a confirmed one yet, and unless you beat it, it will assuredly beat you. In which case, you might as well blow out your brains at once. You began in order to relieve some pain, no doubt—sciatica, perhaps?’

‘No,’ answered the other; ‘what let me into the secret was that about a couple of months ago my horse trod pretty heavily on my foot while I was dressing him. They had to remove a toenail, and for a few days the place hurt like blazes. So old Bowker injected morphia—which suggested a happy thought to me. Since it was so easy and comparatively inexpensive a matter to get rid of all one’s troubles, physical and mental, for a bit, why shouldn’t I treat myself to the luxury when I felt inclined? You may think that my mental troubles don’t press very severely upon me, but that’s all you know about it! There are times, I can tell you, when life in the British army is a precious good imitation of a hell upon earth. It isn’t so bad for N.C.O.’s, I admit; still I had worries of my own, independent of the service.’

He paused and twisted his fair moustache gloomily, while Matthew remarked, ‘Worries connected with the other sex, I dare say.’

Spencer, who had been speaking without affectation and in almost penitent accents, instantly assumed an expression of fatuous self-complacency. ‘Oh, the Colonel has been telling you tales, has he?’ said he. ‘Well, upon my word, I can’t help it! Women are always getting me into a mess; but it’s a great deal more their fault than mine. If they would only exercise a little common prudence, these encounters with irate husbands might be avoided, and——’

‘But I thought the lady was a widow,’ interrupted Matthew.

‘What lady? Oh, little Mrs. Johnson. Yes, I believe Mr. Johnson is quite dead and buried, and, between ourselves, I have sometimes thought that it might be my destiny to replace him. I may do it yet—who knows? Beggars mustn’t be choosers, and although the fair Arabella—her name is Arabella—is not precisely the incarnation of refinement, she has a snug little income of her own. Whether this business will put her off at all I don’t know; but I shouldn’t think it would. She has such a high respect for my ancestry.’

Matthew could not help for a moment regarding poor Mrs.

Johnson in the light of a possible *dea ex machinâ*; but he put the thought away, as being too cynical, and said rather severely :

‘It would be no bad thing if you had a little more respect both for your ancestors and for yourself. What possessed you to go and get drunk after you had discovered that that money was missing? Was it sheer recklessness?’

‘That would have been it, no doubt, if I had gone and got drunk; but, as a fact, I didn’t. If you care to know what was the matter with me when I was collared, I don’t mind telling you. I knew there was no chance of escape for me, and I made up my mind to chuck it. Life as a convict, or even as a ranker, isn’t so delightful as to be worth preserving when you can put an end to yourself without pain. Only I suppose I didn’t know how much morphia goes to a poison-dose, for all the effect it had upon me was to make me dazed and stupid. As soon as I found out that I wasn’t going to die, off I started to the chemist’s to buy some more, making fine zigzags on the way, I dare say. Anyhow, these blundering fools got hold of me and wanted to lock me up for being drunk in the streets. Some of them had a grudge against me, I believe; but whether that was so or not, I was bound to show fight. As I told you just now, I wish I hadn’t; still, if I hadn’t, I should have been charged with drunkenness all the same; so perhaps it doesn’t make very much odds.’

‘I am glad, at all events, that you were preserved from committing suicide,’ Matthew remarked.

‘It is very polite of you to say so; but my own impression is that my disappearance from these earthly scenes would have been a distinct advantage to some people and a misfortune for nobody. Will you please tell Anne that I am infinitely obliged to her, but that she had much better drop me for the future. I won’t go so far as to admit that I have always been a blackguard, but nothing can be more positive than that I am an irreclaimable blackguard now. She will never get any comfort out of me, and if she persists in befriending me, I shall only get her into fresh trouble. The governor understands me a good deal better than she does.’

A hardened miscreant would scarcely have said that, Matthew thought. At all events, it seemed worth while to reason with him, and nobody could be more persuasive than Matthew, because nobody could have a wider range of sympathy with human nature in all its varying and contradictory phases. If, at the end of a somewhat protracted homily, Spencer Frere remained ostentatiously

unrepentant, if he derided the popular axiom that it is never too late to mend, and if he refused to make any rash promises respecting his own future conduct, he nevertheless had the good grace to thank his mentor heartily.

'You mean well,' he said. 'I'm sorry I spoke so brutally about your profession—when a man is down on his luck he says all sorts of things that he doesn't mean, you know—and I'm really and truly grateful to you. What can I do to show my gratitude?'

'Well, you can do this,' Matthew answered: 'you can spare your sister as much as is possible. Of course, when you write to her, you will have to tell her about the court-martial and its results, but you need not say anything about the pecuniary part of the business. I am sure she would rather that you didn't, and I ask you, as a personal favour, not to do so. As regards the future, I hope I may trust you to refrain from appealing to her for pecuniary help again.'

'Upon my oath, I never will; I don't mind binding myself to that extent.'

'Very well. Then, as regards the present, I have one thing more to say. I don't feel at liberty to explain exactly how I am situated, but so it is that I have a little money still left at your disposal, and the wish of your friends is that all outstanding bills should be paid. Will you tell me honestly how much you owe and to whom you owe it?'

Spencer complied with this request, naming a sum which fell short of Matthew's anticipations, and soon afterwards the two men parted. It was agreed that the younger should submit to the punishment which was his due, and possess his soul in patience for the time being. As to his ultimate destiny he seemed to be curiously indifferent.

'Oh, I shall live or die; sink or swim,' said he, with a laugh; 'it will be all the same a hundred years hence, anyhow. But if ever I have it in my power to do you a good turn, Mr. Austin, you'll find that I haven't forgotten you.'

CHAPTER XIX.

HUMBLE PIE.

MANY plausible arguments may be adduced in favour of hard-heartedness, but that to which the fullest support is lent by experience is that helping a lame dog over a stile means acquiring possession of that dog, together with the privilege of paying for his annual licence until the end of his earthly career. Now, one really cannot be expected to stock one's premises with curs, even if one could afford to do so. There are Homes for Lost Dogs (in which a well-appointed lethal chamber is provided), so that a man who is at once wise and humane will avert his gaze when he sees a luckless specimen of the canine race in difficulties. Who has not received those dreadful letters which begin, 'Relying upon your kindness to me in the past, I feel encouraged to hope that you will assist me in the present emergency'? And who does not know that 'the present emergency' implies future emergencies and many of them? 'You have been fool enough to help me once,' the writer seems to say, with pitiless logic; 'it is therefore reasonable to believe that you will remain a fool to the end of the chapter.' And the writer's sagacity seldom misleads him.

It was something of this sort that Matthew was saying to himself as he sat in the railway carriage, on his return journey to Wilverton. He had chosen to rush in where persons more legitimately concerned might very well have feared to tread; he had in a certain sense made himself responsible for Spencer Frere, and his responsibility could hardly end with the payment of that worthy's bills. The payment of the bills had in itself been a somewhat unpleasant job, exposing him to queries from inquisitive tradesmen and altogether rendering him more conspicuous than he could have wished. Colonel Egerton, moreover, though declaring emphatically that, upon his word, 'the fellow ought to be devilish grateful to you, sir,' had allowed it to be inferred that he did not personally anticipate that result; while the taciturn Bowker had summed up the situation with the concise remark of 'Mere question of time, you'll find.'

'Still,' reflected Matthew, 'I don't see how I could have acted otherwise. It *is* on the cards that he may turn over a new leaf; it *is* on the cards that I may eventually be able to discover some

opening for him ; and even if I can't, there's no particular harm done. The most awkward thing of all will be my first interview with his sister. Whatever happens, she must not suspect that he has been charged with stealing, or that I have mixed myself up in the business. One comfort is that the story of drunkenness and insubordination will scarcely surprise her ; she has had so many misgivings from the outset.'

Nevertheless, he had a powerful and pusillanimous longing to defer that necessary conversation with Anne, and much relieved was he to hear, on the morrow, that circumstances had granted him a respite. The Frere family—so he was informed—had departed to the sea-side for a few weeks, leaving Hayes Park in the hands of painters and paper-hangers ; so that, unless he wrote to Spencer's sister—which he did not feel called upon to do—he might look forward to a period of tranquil and uninterrupted attention to his own affairs.

These were, for the moment, of a recreative rather than a professional nature. Wilverton was at its dullest and emptiest, patients were few, while well-ordered gardens might be said to be almost at their best. To breakfast leisurely and late, to saunter out into the sunshine, to count the buds upon the rose-bushes, to note with thankfulness the absence of green-fly and maggots, to hold long colloquies with the gardener, afterwards, perhaps, to loll for half an hour or so in a hammock beneath the great copper-beech, with a book and a cigarette—all this was delightful to Matthew, who, unlike the majority of hard-working men, secretly adored laziness. Then, too, his letters were so pleasant to read that they could well bear a second and a third perusal. By degrees, and almost imperceptibly, the tone of Lilian's correspondence was changing, and the change, he thought, was decidedly for the better. There had been something unnatural, something almost insincere—though he did not make use of that term—in the vehement dislike which she had begun by expressing for London and its society, but which she had now suffered to drop into abeyance.

'After all,' she said, in one of her voluminous, hastily scribbled epistles, 'I am glad to have seen what the smart world is like. I don't want to live in it ; still I can quite understand there being people who would rather not live at all than live out of it. Sometimes I wish you were here—no, I don't mean that ; of course I *always* wish you were here—but I sometimes wish you could look on at my little triumphs. Would you utterly despise them, I

wonder, or would you think there was rather more in me than you used to imagine? I feel hundreds and hundreds of years older than I did in those days, and Mamma would tell you that I have immensely improved. I haven't changed, though—no, not the least little bit!—and if she thinks I have, she is very much mistaken.'

'But of course she must have changed in some respects,' was Matthew's inward comment; 'it would be against nature if she hadn't. Besides, she admits it.' And always, in answering her letters, he was careful to say how little he grudged her the triumphs of which she spoke. Perhaps also he would not have minded looking on at them; certainly he would have liked very much to run up to London for a week or ten days. But he felt that he would hardly be fulfilling his part of the compact were he to yield to that temptation. Lady Sara had treated him fairly, not to say generously, and the least he could do was to remain in the background until the stipulated truce should have expired.

Thus in unbroken quietude and almost unbroken solitude those warm days of early summer passed away for him pleasantly enough—blue, hazy days, during which light breezes from every point of the compass rose and fell, and the air was full of the song of birds, and fleecy clouds melted into mist towards sunset. A few lines from Colonel Egerton, who had good-naturedly asked for his address, informed him of Spencer Frere's sentence, which indeed had been a foregone conclusion. 'It's bad, but it might have been a great deal worse,' the Colonel wrote. 'Perhaps the loss of his gold lace and a taste of the bread and water of affliction may bring him to his senses; still I can only repeat that I believe the best thing his father can do with him now is to take him out of this and pack him off to the Colonies.'

At any rate, Matthew could take no step at present; so he laid the subject aside for future consideration, as doctors, lawyers, and other men whose duty it is to consider a variety of puzzling cases soon acquire a faculty for doing at will.

The end of this period of repose and seclusion was reached one afternoon when Mrs. Jennings stopped her carriage to beckon to him and express a gracious wish that he would show himself at her garden-party on the following day.

'I forget whether I sent you a card or not,' said she. 'If I didn't, it was only because I know that you eschew daylight entertainments. Of course you are quite right, and during the

busy season Dr. Jennings will only accept even dinner invitations provisionally; but just now you must have a good deal of spare time on your hands, so I hope you will come to us. You will meet your friends the Freres if you do; I dare say you have heard that they returned home yesterday.'

Matthew had not heard of that circumstance, but now that it had been made known to him, he felt compelled to swallow down the excuse which he had already opened his lips to formulate. Since Anne was once more within reach, it would not do for him to shirk an occasion of meeting her, nor was he sorry that their first meeting was to be a quasi-public one. A crowded garden-party—and Mrs. Jennings would have deemed herself socially disgraced if any party of hers had not been crowded—would afford better opportunities for the exercise of duplicity than could be hoped for from the afternoon call which politeness would render it incumbent upon him to pay ere long.

What disconcerted, and even alarmed, him a little was the manner of his reception by the lady whom he proposed to deceive. Soon after his arrival upon the scene of festivity he made his way to her side through an intervening throng of Browns, Joneses, and Robinsons, and it was without the faintest smile that she returned his greeting. Anne was looking very handsome, in a new French-grey costume which fitted her to perfection; she was also looking very grave, and she was so evidently displeased with him that her displeasure could scarcely be ignored. Did she think that he ought to have written to her?—or had she, by means of one of those strange feminine processes of reasoning which must remain for ever inscrutable to the male mind, arrived at the conclusion that he was in some way to blame for the catastrophe that had overtaken Spencer? The only way to find out what was the matter was to ask her; so he began, without preface:

'You have heard from your brother?'

'Yes,' she answered, 'I have heard from him; I must speak to you about it. I am afraid,' she added, looking round her with an irritated frown, 'there is no secluded place to which we can go; but if we were to get behind that brass band which is making such a horrible noise, we should at least run no risk of being overheard.'

The fact was that Mrs. Jennings's pleasure-grounds were of somewhat circumscribed area, and her invitation had been responded to by about three hundred people. These, however,

in accordance with the national habit, had packed themselves closely together on the terrace fronting the house; so that comparative solitude was obtainable at a reasonable distance from the braying band and on the further side of the screen afforded by a clump of rhododendrons.

'Godfrey wrote to tell me of your brother's—misfortune,' Matthew said. 'Of course I would have let you know of it, only I felt sure that you would hear, and—and there wasn't much to be said, unluckily.'

'There was nothing to be said,' assented Anne; 'I never expected you to write.' She added, with an obvious effort, 'I am extremely grateful to you for all that you have done for Spencer.'

Neither her face nor her voice conveyed the impression of extreme gratitude; but Matthew hastened to assure her that nothing of the sort was owing to him.

'There was no great trouble involved in writing a few letters and calling at the War Office,' he remarked; 'I only wish the result had been more successful. As it is, I am afraid our hopes of getting a commission must be laid aside for some little time to come.'

'He will never get his commission now; I was not thinking of that,' Anne rejoined. 'Of course we are very much indebted to you for having secured him the chance; but debts of that kind may be submitted to, I suppose, without—without downright humiliation. What I cannot understand your having imagined is that we could allow you to pay a large sum of money for us secretly.'

Matthew's jaw fell. 'Confound the stupid idiot!' he ejaculated inwardly. Aloud he said, 'I am afraid your brother must have broken his word. He promised me that that part of the business should be between ourselves.'

'Have I not always warned you,' returned Anne, with a dreary little laugh, 'that there is no dependence to be placed upon Spencer? He did not betray you in his first letter, but I knew, from the way in which he expressed himself, that there must be more behind, and by degrees the whole story came out. I am glad it has come out; though I can't pretend to be glad that you should have——'

'Been so impertinent and officious?' suggested Matthew, since she seemed at a loss for words to conclude her sentence.

She neither confirmed nor disputed the sentiments ascribed to her; so he went on: 'I am very sorry that you have heard of this, and still more sorry to have offended you; but I am sure, if you will think of it, you will see that I couldn't have acted in any other way. It was absolutely necessary that the money should be paid, and there was no time to consult anybody. If I had driven out to Hayes Park, upon the chance of seeing you, after Godfrey's letter reached me, I should have been too late.'

Anne had pulled one of the tough leaves off the shrub beside which she was standing, and had begun to tear it into strips. 'I know that you saved him, and I know that we can never be thankful enough to you for your promptitude,' she answered slowly. 'But why did you make a secret of it? Why did you leave me to find out for myself what you had done?'

'Was it so very unpardonable that I should wish to spare you all the distress I could?'

'Oh, not unpardonable, perhaps; but I think—well, I think it was rather a mistake. I suppose you would not quite like it if you were to discover that I had been paying your tradesmen's bills for you?'

'My dear Miss Frere, I have not been paying any bill for you, and it would never occur to me to take such a liberty. Surely, if I feel inclined to give or lend fifty pounds to a man of my acquaintance, that is a matter which only concerns him and me.'

'It was a good deal more than fifty pounds; but the question, as you know, was not one between you and a man of your acquaintance. You gave Spencer to understand that the money came from me; how can you tell that he would have accepted it if you had spoken the truth?'

Matthew wished with all his heart that he had told the truth; for he felt very sure that Spencer's scruples would have been easily overcome. All he could find to say for himself was, 'I acted for the best.'

'I quite believe that you did,' Anne replied, in somewhat less severe accents; 'only—however, there is no use in saying any more about it. Of course you must be repaid.'

This was exceedingly painful, and the worst of it was that refusals or protests could only give additional offence.

'What have I done,' Matthew exclaimed, after a rather long pause, 'that you should treat me with such unfriendliness? Why

may I not remain your brother's creditor for a time? Indeed it is not at all an uncommon thing for a man to borrow a small sum from a friend in an emergency. If I have never done it myself, that is simply owing to the accident of my never having been hard up; I should be afraid to say how many times I have lent money to other people.'

'And how many times have you received your money back? But nothing was said about a loan in this case. You represented to Spencer that the money came from me, and it is I who am responsible to you for it.'

In vain Matthew declared that, to the best of his recollection and belief, he had made no such misrepresentation. He had, he candidly owned, allowed her brother to form his own conclusions, but that had been merely as a measure of expediency and to avoid needless discussion. For the rest, he would, if she wished it, write a few lines to Lowcester that evening and explain.

Anne would have none of these specious excuses. Her name had been made use of, she said, and Mr. Austin must surely understand that it was impossible for her to accept either a loan or a gift of money from him. This was very dignified and quite unanswerable; but poor Anne, to her shame and sorrow, was unable to follow up her declaration of independence by practical proof of it. Her pale face flushed distressingly, and she had to clear away an obstruction in her throat before she could continue:

'Unfortunately, I must ask you to allow me a little time and to let me discharge my debt by instalments. My allowance, as I think I have told you before, is not a large one, and I have had a good many unforeseen expenses lately. I do not see how it can be less than a year——'

'Miss Frere,' interrupted Matthew, 'I think you are behaving most unkindly and ungenerously, and it doesn't seem to me that I have deserved such treatment. However, since you will have it so, let it be so; I do not wish you to feel that you are under any obligation—even an imaginary one—to me. But at least I may be allowed to mention that it will make not the slightest difference to me whether I am repaid to-day or ten years hence. The only doubt in my mind is whether I am justified in keeping all this from your father's knowledge any longer.'

'Ah, you are determined to spare me nothing!' exclaimed Anne, clasping her hands together. 'But of course you are quite right; I have no business to assume false airs of pride when I

ought to be humbling myself in the dust before you. If you tell my father—and that, I have no doubt, would be the proper thing to do—you will be thanked as you deserve, and Spencer's debts will be paid once more.'

'Only you would rather that I did not tell?'

Anne looked down. 'It would be the last straw,' she said. 'Spencer would never be forgiven—never! Oh, I know I am ungenerous and ungracious—I can't help it. You must think what you please of me, but I do *hate* to have to ask this additional favour!'

'Then you shall not ask it. From purely selfish motives, I am reluctant to let Mr. Frere know that I have been busying myself on the sly with his family affairs, and I don't intend to do so. I must admit, too, that allowing your name to be dragged into this business was both stupid and unwarrantable on my part. Your brother, by my way of thinking, might very well have accepted a little temporary aid from me, but I quite understand that you cannot—or will not. Will you accept my sincere apologies, and believe that, however thoughtless and clumsy I may have been, the last thing that I meant, or could have meant, was to humiliate you?'

He extended his hand half involuntarily, and Anne's gloved fingers advanced to meet it. 'You are as generous as I am the reverse,' she said constrainedly. 'One is what one is—there is no help for it. Still I don't think I am altogether in the wrong.'

Matthew, to tell the honest truth, thought she was; so he held his peace. He did not venture to inquire whether she had formed any fresh project on her brother's behalf; still less could he think of proffering assistance. It was just as well that the colloquy was now broken off by the appearance of Mrs. Frere, and before long he made his escape.

'It is what I foresaw from the outset,' his hostess remarked to her spouse later in the day; 'that foolish young man has been jilted already, and I must say that it serves him right.'

'Eh?—jilted?' echoed Dr. Jennings, not ill-pleased at the supposed discomfiture of his ambitious rival. 'Who told you that?'

'There are things,' replied the good lady oracularly, 'which one doesn't require to be told, if one has eyes in one's head. He only came here because he was afraid it would create remark if he didn't; he scarcely spoke to anybody, and when I inquired, before

he left, what news he had of Lady Sara Murray, he was downright sulky. Well, well! I really can't pity him; he should have more common sense.'

CHAPTER XX.

LILIAN MEETS AN OLD ACQUAINTANCE.

WHATEVER assertions may be made to the contrary, there never yet lived the woman to whom admiration was unwelcome. They are so fond of saying this about themselves—or at least about one another—that it is safe to accept the accuracy of the statement upon such unimpeachable authority; and indeed, *mutatis mutandis*, it applies to ourselves as much as to them. We all want to succeed, we all like applause; the only difference between us and the ladies in that respect being that our opportunities of attaining pre-eminence are far more varied than theirs. Consequently, there was nothing surprising in Lilian Murray's gradual reconciliation to a notoriety which many of her compeers would have given ten years of life to share. She was probably the most beautiful girl in London, she was admitted to be the most beautiful in that small section of the community which is styled great by reason of its rank or riches, and everything leads the unprejudiced looker-on to believe that that position must be delightful and intoxicating while it lasts.

That it cannot, in the nature of things, last long was what Miss Murray's experienced relatives were never weary of impressing upon her. They added (in case she should not know it) that the glory of being a reigning unmarried beauty is not so much valuable for its own sake as for what it may be expected to bring, and when she told them that she was engaged to be married to a country doctor, they only laughed, affecting to treat so absurd a statement as a good joke. She began by telling everybody that her heart and her hand had already been disposed of; but after a time she ceased to thrust unasked-for information down the throats of the indifferent. If everybody likes to be admired, nobody likes to be laughed at, and it was perhaps sufficient to have perfect confidence in one's own immutability.

At all events, there was no treachery to Matthew in enjoying the whirl of gaiety and excitement into which she was plunged almost from the very beginning of her fashionable career. She

might have retorted '*Tu l'as voulu, Georges Dandin,*' if he had displayed any epistolary uneasiness; but, on the contrary, he seemed not only contented but glad that she should see as much as possible of contemporary society. And she took to it all (notwithstanding the recalcitrancy exhibited in her earlier letters to her betrothed) as a duck takes to water. In a very short space of time she heard and saw a great deal; she soon picked up current phraseology, possibly also current notions of morality; there was not nearly as much difficulty about teaching her her lesson as there is about drawing out the hereditary instincts of a thoroughbred horse or a setter of high pedigree. It is true that she maintained certain mental reservations; but these she now knew how to keep to herself.

It was on a Sunday afternoon when the season was at its height that she was taken to Tattersall's by some of those good-natured kinsmen and kinswomen of hers who were wont to relieve Lady Sara of the burden of chaperonage. On a Sunday afternoon at Tattersall's in the month of June one meets, if not quite everybody, at least a large proportion of the illustrious beings who are thus designated amongst themselves, and Miss Murray was speedily surrounded by the usual throng of smooth-shaven young men in long frock-coats. She was entirely at her ease with these gilded youths; her aversion for them, as a class, was a thing of the past, and although she snubbed some of them, she was amiable enough with others. The truth is that they were by no means disagreeable young men, while the remarks of some of their number with regard to horseflesh and racing were worthy of being listened to. Lilian, to be sure, was not specially interested in either subject; still she allowed herself to be conducted by a sporting peer in close proximity to the heels of a long string of hunters and, when he indicated their several blemishes, nodded her head confirmatively. Most of us can contrive to detect the obvious as soon as it has been clearly pointed out, and there is a distinct satisfaction in feeling that we know a little more than other people, to whom that advantage has been denied.

Lilian, therefore, was thinking to herself that, although it was very hot and there was a dense crowd and the stable was not quite as well ventilated as it might have been, she was better off, upon the whole, than if she had stayed at home or gone to church, when she suddenly became aware of a smartly-attired gentleman who was not only taking off his hat but holding out his hand to

her. Over the wrist which he was not holding out hung a slim umbrella with a large crook handle, and to this she pointed, as she returned his greeting, remarking, with a smile :

‘ Out of the sling, I see. I congratulate you.’

‘ Oh, I threw away my sling ages ago,’ answered Leonard Jerome. ‘ Thanks for your congratulations, all the same. Allow me, in return, to congratulate you very sincerely.’

‘ Upon what ?’

‘ Well, I suppose I might congratulate you upon a heap of things—at any rate, the society papers tell me so—but only one of them is worth mentioning. Dear old Austin may be a lucky beggar, and I believe he is, but I’m bound to say that I think you are in luck too.’

‘ I think I am,’ answered Lilian gravely.

She would have had some difficulty in explaining why Mr. Jerome’s frankness of speech irritated her: perhaps it is never very pleasant to be called lucky; perhaps also she doubted the honesty of his felicitations upon an engagement which everybody else had agreed to regard as a matter for condolence or ridicule. Instead, however, of manifesting her feelings, as she would have done a few months earlier, she passed on through the throng with Leonard Jerome, deserting her sporting nobleman, who was at that moment anxiously examining the bruised stifle of a weight-carrier.

‘ I have seen you more than once from afar,’ Leonard resumed, ‘ but you are rather unapproachable in these days. Would it be permitted to a humble rustic acquaintance to call upon Lady Sara? She told me I might, you know.’

‘ We shall be charmed,’ answered Lilian, furnishing him with her address, which he at once wrote down.

‘ And may I hope that you will be a little less savage with me now than you used to be when I was so constantly and so unfortunately in the way ?’

‘ Was I savage? Well, I dare say you were rather in the way sometimes at Wilverton; but you won’t be in anybody’s way here; there isn’t room. One doesn’t notice the elbows of one neighbour in particular amongst such a host of elbows and neighbours.’

‘ I suppose not. And how do you like London, as compared with Wilverton? It’s absurd to ask, though. London must be Paradise to a few privileged folks, and I presume it won’t

be very long before the sole attraction of Wilverton takes his ticket for the metropolis. Please, when you write to Austin, tell him from me that I'm looking out for him.'

'I am afraid even that inducement would not persuade him to leave his work,' answered Lilian, with the smiling, inattentive look which women are fond of putting on when they wish to annoy their male companions. 'He does not talk of coming up to London.'

'Then,' rejoined Leonard emphatically, 'all I can say is he is a duffer. He ought to be here.'

They were standing in the glazed central yard, and Miss Murray's brown eyes, which had been roving towards distant corners, were now slowly turned upon Mr. Jerome, with an air of disdainful interrogation. 'Do you mean to be impertinent?' they seemed to say. 'Possibly you do; but it is of no consequence. Your impertinence would be scarcely worth noticing.'

Relations might have become strained if Lilian's cousins had not just then hastened up to take her away to a tea-crush. After hesitating for a moment, she introduced him to them, and so took leave of him, without repeating the hand-shaking ceremony.

A few days later he called at the tiny house in Mayfair which Lady Sara had hired for the season, and was received with the prompt 'Not at 'ome' that might have been anticipated at five o'clock in the afternoon.

'Jerome?' said Lady Sara, when she picked up his card out of a number of others and scrutinised it through her glasses; 'is not that the young man who broke some of his bones down at Wilverton last winter?'

Her ladyship's memory, it will be perceived, could no longer retain the names of such insignificant persons as the heirs-presumptive of obscure country gentlemen, and in truth she had clean forgotten having ever contemplated Leonard Jerome as a potential son-in-law. She now dreamt, and was to all appearance justified in dreaming, of far more exalted connections.

Bitter disappointment was, however, in store for her. What was the use of having achieved a brilliant, an almost unprecedented success if nothing was to come of it? And Lilian seemed determined that nothing should come of it. One of the saddest days of poor Lady Sara's life was that on which her daughter quietly informed her that she had just refused the eldest son of a

prodigiously wealthy contractor, whose virtues and riches had recently met with deserved recognition in the form of a peerage.

'It is sheer, downright madness!' the unhappy lady exclaimed. 'This makes the fourth, and much the best, chance that you have thrown away. Anybody—anybody in England might have been proud and thankful to make such a match! Lilian, dear, what *can* you expect?'

'I expect to marry the man of my choice some day,' the girl responded composedly.

'Oh, poor dear Mr. Austin! Of course he is very nice and very good; but really——'

'Really what?'

'I hoped you had given up thinking of him, that was all. You haven't spoken about him for such a long time.'

It was true that Lilian had given up speaking about the subject, because she knew that it was one upon which her mother's sympathies could not be with her; but she had never wavered in her allegiance, nor did she for a moment distrust herself. Only she did, every now and then, wish that there were somebody to whom Matthew's name might be mentioned without fear of ridicule. And perhaps it was because Mr. Jerome was always willing, and even eager, to expatiate upon the manifold merits of his medical friend that she learnt to look with pleasurable anticipations for the sight of Leonard's handsome face.

The sight was seldom denied to her, after that preliminary encounter at Tattersall's which had so nearly terminated in a quarrel. Whether by accident or by design, Mr. Jerome was at almost all the resorts of public and private amusement to which she was taken, and it soon became a matter of course that he should lose no time in making his way to her side.

'You are a sort of safety-valve,' she told him one evening, when he had taken the liberty of thanking her for her softened demeanour towards him; 'I can say things to you which I am not allowed to say to anybody else in London. Besides, you dance beautifully.'

They frequently met at balls, and it was only natural that, having one important bond of union, they should proceed to discover others. Lilian's early prejudice against the man who was now her favourite partner had quite disappeared; she began to feel a sincere interest in him and his affairs, about which he was always ready to discourse openly, and she acknowledged to herself

that Matthew had not been far wrong in calling him manly and unaffected. For the rest, their intercourse was not uninterruptedly friendly. Leonard, in his jealous zeal for his absent friend, occasionally took the liberty of remonstrating with her upon what he was pleased to call her flirtations, and when he ventured to do this he was promptly sent to Coventry until he saw the error of his ways and came, with deep humility, to implore forgiveness.

'I know I am officious and impertinent,' he told her once, 'but sometimes it is out of my power to hold my tongue. You have a way of looking at men—I dare say it means nothing—I'm sure it means nothing; but there are moments when—well, when I simply can't stand it!'

He had to make his apologies a good deal more abject than that before they were accepted; but the period of estrangement seldom lasted for more than forty-eight hours. The truth was that he had gradually become essential to Lilian's comfort, and, after all, since her conscience did not accuse her, why should she make such a fuss about a little vicarious jealousy? Leonard heard of some of the advantageous proposals which she had declined, and great was his joy on being made aware of them. He could not have displayed more satisfaction if he had been Matthew himself. Indeed, she often wondered whether Matthew would have displayed half as much.

Now, it came to pass, one fine afternoon in the beginning of July, that Lady Sara and her daughter drove to the mansions near Albert Gate where Mr. Jerome rented a flat, having been invited by that gentleman to take tea with him and meet his sister, Lady Bannock. He had before this been several times admitted to the Murrays' little house in Tilney Street, where he had been made welcome by Lilian's mother, who had always thought him a pleasant sort of young man and was quite willing to be introduced to his bachelor abode and his influential relatives.

Lady Bannock was really influential, being the wife of a Scotch peer whose means were abundant and who was given to hospitality. She was a plump, good-natured little woman, without any vestige of her brother's comeliness of form and feature—which may have been one reason why her admiration and affection for her brother knew no bounds. Doubtless she had been instructed to be particularly agreeable to her brother's friends; for she greeted the two ladies with effusion on their entrance, saying that she had heard so much about them from Leonard and had been wishing for a

long time past to make their personal acquaintance. Lady Sara and she were soon deep in one of those conversations relating to common friends which are so engrossing to the persons concerned and so desperately uninteresting to everybody else. Lilian, meanwhile, took a leisurely survey of Mr. Jerome's reception-room, which was lofty and sunny, which commanded a prospect of green trees and of the crowded Park beyond them, and which was furnished in admirable taste.

'You know how to make yourself comfortable, I see,' she remarked to her entertainer, when he brought her a cup of tea.

'Do you like these rooms?' he asked. 'Well, if one must needs live in London, I dare say one is as well off here as anywhere else, and I thought, upon the whole, I would rather make my home in a few small rooms amongst other civilised beings than shiver in one corner of a great empty house on the north-east coast. They only just hold me, though.'

'I should have thought you might have been contained in a smaller space than this; but perhaps you have large ideas. What do you consist of here?—drawing-room, dining-room, bedroom, and bathroom?'

'Yes; and I have one small spare room and a smoking-den.'

'What more can you possibly want? In our wretched little bandbox we are obliged to turn round with precaution, lest we should break through the outer wall and tumble out into the street. Is it allowable to inspect your premises?'

Leonard made the only reply that could be made; but it struck her at once that he did not make it with much alacrity, and she said no more. After a time, however, he complied with her wish of his own accord, and conducted her into his dining-room, which was of ample dimensions and was rendered attractive by Chippendale chairs, a fine old oak sideboard, and a few excellent etchings. When she had examined and expressed her approbation of these, he turned back into the corridor and, throwing open the door of a small room adjoining the drawing-room—

'This is my private dog-kennel,' he said, without entering. 'There's nothing to see in it.'

He could hardly have adopted a surer method of convincing her that there *was* something to see in it, and, being a woman, she was unable to resist the temptation of pushing past him.

A moment later she regretted her curiosity; for there, staring her in the face, was only too evidently the thing which he had not

desired to exhibit to her—namely a full-length photograph of herself in a heavy silver frame. It stood upon the writing-table near the window, and was much too big and conspicuous to be ignored. Lilian pointed to it with her forefinger.

‘I don’t remember giving you that,’ she said quietly, yet in a voice which boded no good to the unlicensed proprietor. ‘Where did you get it?’

Leonard, who had become very red in the face, made a somewhat unsuccessful effort to recover his *aplomb*.

‘I got it from the photographer,’ he confessed; ‘please don’t kill him. He was most unwilling to part with it, and only yielded when I had recourse to subterfuges. In fact, I am afraid I left him with the impression that I was an authorised person.’

‘I see,’ said Lilian. ‘Well, as you are not an authorised person, and as you seem to have come into possession of this work of art by means of what you prettily call a subterfuge, it can hardly be considered your property.’

She picked up the frame, withdrew the photograph from it, and, tearing the latter across, put the pieces in her pocket.

‘You will have to find a substitute,’ she remarked. ‘There are plenty of actresses and other celebrities whose portraits you can purchase without any need for subterfuge or any breach of the law.’

He tried in vain to make his peace with her; he affirmed—truly or untruly, and in any case very ill-advisedly—that his intention had been to procure a likeness of Matthew, as a *pendant* to that of which he had been deprived, and he assured her, with equal clumsiness, that nobody, except herself and his man-servant, was aware of his indiscretion. The only reply that she vouchsafed to him was a contemptuous shrug of the shoulders, and her immediate return to the drawing-room robbed him of all opportunity for further allusion to the matter.

‘Lady Bannock is quite charming,’ Lady Sara remarked to her daughter on the way home. ‘She wants us to stay with them in Scotland towards the end of next month, and if she repeats her invitation, I think we may as well accept it. We shall be in their neighbourhood, you know.’

‘Shall we?’ asked Lilian absently.

‘Why, my dear child, have you forgotten that we have been asked to stay at three houses.’

‘Oh, of course; but you said it would have to depend upon

your health, and Scotland is so cold ! Don't you think you would be better at Wilverton ?'

'In August !' Lady Sara paused for a moment and then said emphatically, 'I hope and believe that there will never be any necessity for us to return to that place.'

Probably she expected some rejoinder, but she received none. Only Lilian, who knew that her will was stronger than her mother's, said to herself, 'It may not be Wilverton, but it shall not be Lady Bannock's. I can answer for that !'

(To be continued.)

THE CARNARVON PENINSULA.

To the dispassionate Englishman the Welsh people do not seem anything like as interesting as their country. But that is, no doubt, because their beloved land is quite exceptionally attractive.

I was driven to an even harsher conclusion than this during my walks and residence in that somewhat benighted district of North Wales known as the Carnarvon Peninsula. Look at it on the map, and see what a long headland it is, with the islet of Bardsey at the toe, like Sicily in its relation to Italy. When you are at Aberdaron, the little village nearest Bardsey, you are about sixteen miles from the railway. That, for Great Britain, is pretty good. One may therefore expect a little roughness in this part of the realm, especially when it is remembered that the inhabitants all speak Welsh, and those of them who retain school history in their minds have still strong views about Edward the Conqueror, and think Owen Glendower one of the great figures in the world's gallery of immortals.

The Welsh of the Peninsula (it is called the Lleyn, which means the Peninsula) do not pretend to have many graces of manner. The majority of them are much like those very ugly chapels of theirs—Salems, Zoars, Moriahs, Jerusalems, Bethels, &c.—which stare with their rectangular or polygonal faces at the Saxon stranger as if they thoroughly resented his intrusion into their domain of influence. If, being thirsty, you ask them for a beverage, they tender you spring water. If, having lost your way, you inquire for a direction, you are either misunderstood and therefore misdirected, or you are treated with calm sniggers which prove you are in a foreign land to which your homebred tongue is an object of ridicule. If, after much persuasion, you induce the mistress of one of the nice, snug-looking white cottages which pervade the landscape to take you in and bed you, unless you have a contempt for fleas you shall pass a wild night. I know well that the general character of the Welsh includes cleanliness in its list of attributes. This, however, does not apply to the Welsh of the Peninsula. They are a people apart, living in the dust of their ancient habits. England seems as remote from them as Germany seems from us. What have they to do with it and its

people? they not unnaturally ask themselves. They are not like the degenerate Kelts of such places of tourist resort as Llanberis, Beddgelert, or Llandudno. These recreants actually talk English over their tea-cups, and attend chapel to hear English sermons. The Peninsula Welsh are of a stouter and more national heart. Their morals are of a high order. They would consider the publican who sold beer on a Sunday as a child of perdition, and the tourist who demanded it as equally lost. They would have entire sympathy with the lady who the other day wrote plaintively to a journal of the Principality asking advice about the spiritual state of a relative who had backslided so far as to spend an evening in a circus.

They are not all like this, but the majority certainly are. I know nothing more depressing to the unprejudiced traveller than his experiences in the Peninsula during a brief restrained tour among the people on Sunday. They all look as if they yearned to attend the funeral of a very near relative. The boys do not whistle. The maidens are more than demure. The older folk are reputed to go to bed between morning service and evening service, having, I suppose, learnt a little of the philosophy of life. And even the young men wear black. Their ministers are, of course, mainly of the unrelenting school, which cannot promote vivacity. Calvin has much to answer for in Wales as well as in the Lowlands of Scotland.

The few exceptions are those who have journeyed into England and stayed there long enough to be inoculated with a little of our own proverbial liveliness and good sense. But even these people keep a tight hold upon their imported notions and convictions. For dear life's sake they must conform to the conduct of their neighbours; else they will be indicted at one or other of the terrible, miscalled social evening meetings, when the flock attend chapel simply and solely, as it seems, to publicly pick holes in the characters of each other. If, on such an occasion, a case is established against them, the minister has it in his prerogative to excommunicate them, pending repentance and confession as public as the charges brought against them.

I have in my mind one such exception. She is a girl to make the heroine of a novel—young, fair, amiability itself, educated in England yet patriotic to the backbone, and whose sweet English lisp and occasional misuse of tenses and prepositions are seducing lures for the susceptible British male. When I, a stranger,

besought shelter in her mother's house, she it was who pleaded for me with the obdurate dame. Later, she waited on me for three days with her own fair hands, sat with me when I was solitary, unfolded her simple sweet young life to me while she leaned her cheek upon her palm, and apologised so prettily for her mother's many fleas and abundant dirt that I began to regard both these defects as domestic qualities of distinction—in the Peninsula. She told me more of her soul, I surmise, than she has told to the grim-faced, tawny-bearded person who stalks up and down the village under his halo of 'the minister.' Her nature seems to me quite spotless. Even the shred of native-born superstition which she retained was comely in her. She told me how her belief in the spirit-world had made her over and over again leave her warm bed in the dead of night and kneel just as she was in the middle of the room, appealing to her deceased father to give her a sign there and then that he was watching over her. No sign had been given, but still she believed.

I find I have commemorated this pretty girl in my notebook in these words: 'I could love this girl: what a white soul she has!' My confession may argue me a simpleton, but that does not distress me in the least.

Such visitors as do find their way to the toe of the Llyn take the coach from Pwllheli. That is a tolerable route, though not the best. It is more enlightening, if more laborious, to don thick boots and walk by the coast through Llanbedrog and Rhiw. One thus sees a surprising number of bulls and sagacious colley dogs, a sufficiency of white Welsh cottages, in the proper season myriads of primroses and hyacinths, as well as gorse-crowned hills, and (most cheerful sight of all) the superb breakers of the Atlantic combing into Hell's Mouth Bay in a line more than three miles long. Also the landscapes over the Principality must be mentioned. These are not to be matched anywhere. One looks south to St. David's Head, and all the cumber of Snowdonia is seen to the north.

The route is distinctly unhackneyed. The Welsh urchins regard you as a marvel, to be revered or mocked according to their temperament. Of houses of entertainment throughout the sixteen miles there may be two, and bread and cheese and ale is all these can afford the traveller. The one at Rhiw is quite remarkable—small and unassuming, on the top of the ridge between Hell's Mouth Bay and Aberdaron, and any number of centuries old. Here, while I rested in the big chimney-corner of

the common room, I learnt something of the famous astuteness of the Welshmen of the Peninsula. A couple of them entered, weatherworn and ragged. They talked a species of English. 'We are poor chaps, sir, we are,' said the spokesman of the two. 'But your glass is empty, what will you drink?' Their innocent ruse succeeded, of course, as it deserved to succeed. The large-bodied Welsh woman who served the ale pretended she knew no English, but there was the ghost of a gleam in her stolid eyes as she brought in another quart—at my expense.

The two hills of Llanbedrog and Rhiw are so steep that few vehicles care to tackle them. The coach goes by a circuitous inland way. Still, one cart passed me in the broad lowlands beneath Rhiw. It contained three servant-maids and a red-haired man with a protrusive beard which betokened his ancient lineage. To the wise this indicated hiring-time. So in effect it was. The girls were changing their 'missuses,' and seemed finely elated about it. At the invitation of the man I mounted a large tin box in the rear of the cart for a short rest. The box, however, was grievously aslant, the road was strewn with new stones, and the quadruped trotted clankingly. Ten minutes of this exercise more than sufficed. Once I was constrained to clutch at the neck of the nearest maid to keep myself from going, and all the while I had to hold on grimly to the edge of the box. They laughed rarely when I at length slid off and pantomimically signified both my thanks and the discomfort their civility had occasioned to me. But I caught them up at the Rhiw Hill, where the woods looking seawards were blue with hyacinths, and in which cuckoo and thrush seemed to be vying with each other in sweet suggestive song. A squirrel also ran up an elm-tree by my side and shook his pretty tail in defiance or appreciation of me.

One is astonished at the amount of population this headland supports. Land's End in Cornwall is desolation to it. True, there are not here two or three hotels, each claiming to be the first and last in England. But tiny homesteads dot the uneven land high up the hills which finally close the Peninsula with their abrupt reddish cliffs laved by the blue sea. They are queer, prim little dwellings, with neat enclosed fields around them and banked walls between, so broad that the people use their summits as thoroughfares, even as the dogs of the district use them for perches whence to assail the stranger when in the mood. These Welsh dogs are unmannerly brutes. One of them speedily tore out a mouthful

from my knickerbockers, and the precedent once established, I came to expect an attack from them as regularly as I espied them in front of me.

I had the luck to be in Aberdaron during the spring hiring-day. This great domestic festival—or otherwise—took place at Sarn, a market village six miles away. It upset the economy of a multitude of homes far and wide. From an early hour the lanes were thick with flighty young women who had given their mistresses notice, and meant to lease themselves out for the coming six months at largely enhanced wages; with carts containing farmers and their wives in quest of servants and farm hands; and with loose-limbed men in black carrying boxes under their arms which held all their worldly kit, and which, with themselves, they were anxious to transfer to a new *régime*. The fair sex without exception were imposingly attired. I cannot say they were dressed up to date. They told me in Aberdaron at the millinery shop that the servant-girls of the district do not care for a fashion until it is two or three years old, somewhat crusted in fact. But there was no doubting their taste in bonnets. They wore them as large nearly as the narrowness of the district lanes would permit. Seen in the Sarn market-place the damsels were suggestive of nothing so much as a grove of palm trees with rather short trunks.

The evening of this important day was devoted to revelry of a kind scandalous to the stricter Welsh people. There was a slip of a circus in the village, and some ginger-bread stalls. These, with beer, made up a gala occasion of a very emphatic kind. The carts reeled home through the night. Their noise and that of their occupants awoke me several times during the dark hours. And the next day those of the servant-girls who had got their wages in advance (a five-pound note or so for the half-year) trooped into the village and indulged themselves *en masse* with new gowns and bonnets.

In my innocence I had hoped that the Peninsula world would abound in Welsh women wearing their ancestral sugar-loaf hats. No such thing. Even the most old-fashioned of crones here would have elevated her nose at the idea. At the millinery shop there were none such on view, though at my request they searched a loft to which the dregs of the market long long ago had been ignominiously consigned, and thence they brought two mournful time-stained hats a foot and a half high. The people of the house laughed at the things much as you or I might ridicule a Crom-

wellian leathern jacket. The words 'Paris make' inscribed within seemed to fully entitle the hats to all the scoffs they excited.

Life in Aberdaron cannot claim to be furious in pace at any time. The two score white houses of the village seem to hob-a-nob amiably, though in a drowsy manner. It is the same with the villagers themselves. They keep a few boats, three or four public-houses, and as many shops. These last are for the seduction of the people from the country round, who sidle hither at all hours of the day for a spell of *dolce far niente* or some beer. There is a venerable church hard by the sands of the Bay; indeed, it is held to be about the oldest building of the kind in Wales. Its aisle-walls are pleasantly decorated with coffin-plates. In its churchyard, which has been picked at by the spring tides much as little boys and girls 'sample' the loaves for which their parents send them to the bakers' shops, are a number of elegant slate monumental slabs, vertical and recumbent. Upon these the more reflective (and perhaps poetical) of the villagers love to recline while they pass spasmodic remarks. Their eyes roam over the confined waters of their little Bay, with the steep cliffs of Pen-y-kil away to the right. Thus they spend agreeable if inactive hours, moving their quids from one corner of their mouths to the other. Their wives and daughters may be heard bustling about with pots and pans and basins in the backyards of the cottages behind them. At times the women break into shrill song. The waves and the wind are an accompaniment to it. And when dinner is ready the gentle idlers among the tombs lurch heavily homewards to satisfy nature's cravings, resolved, however, to return to the churchyard as soon as possible for digestive purposes.

It is a tranquillising little place, quaint and secluded rather than beautiful. Yet its sands are of the right kind for children, with fantastic red boulders embedded in them, and, in a southerly wind, with substantial waves bowling after each other into the Bay. Its dearth of social diversion is only what you would expect. That accounts for the otherwise culpable manner in which the people lounge from door to door in quest of morsels of piquant gossip. Much of this gossip came to my ears while I lodged at the millinery shop. It was transparently trivial for the most part: about the approaching death of some old inhabitant, or the near advent of a new inhabitant; the brisk interchange of ill words between two ladies, mistresses of adjacent houses; or the absurdity of the bonnets in which the two twelve-year-old Owen girls (just out to

service) had invested on the strength of their hire-money. There was also, as there was bound to be, no small amount of undisguised flirtation between the swarthy young men with rings in their ears and the somewhat pretty girl who kept the millinery shop. Swarthy young men with rings in their ears ought not to want articles of millinery, but they seemed to. And while I sat in my dusty parlour—with divers stiff, uninteresting, clerical gentlemen on the walls—quite late of an evening, these lazy young seafaring fellows cracked their jokes with the girl till the laughter became loud enough to distract me. I dare say the maiden was well endowed with tact. At any rate, she came to see me periodically, and told, with deep sighs, of the weariness of spirit the young men and their inanity brought upon her. For all that, I have little doubt she will marry one of them some day.

In at least one respect I was foolish ere exiling myself at the toe of the Llyn. I carried with me no more cigars than my case held. These went in a day. Then I made such an outcry for more that the village was requisitioned for cigars. The millinery girl conjured her swarthy friends to see if they hadn't a box or two of 'smuggled smokes' in their houses. The inns, too, were searched. But it was to no purpose. Aberdaron does not favour cigars. It likes a black sort of tobacco with a very strong smell, and so cheap that I am ashamed to mention the price. To this I was compelled to turn my attention. A pair of simple unwaxed clay pipes were provided at the same time. I am somewhat infatuated with nicotine, but never was the strength of my infatuation more severely tried. I smoked myself into a series of mad headaches, and wondered what the brains and stomachs of the Welshmen of the Peninsula could be made of.

Further, I had few books with me—by no means enough to carry through the evenings of my stay. This cast me upon the local literature even as I was thrown upon the local tobacco. The majority of the books that were offered me were in Welsh. But also there were divers volumes of sermons in English by a famous Keltic Calvinist. These were fine reading for wet, stormy nights. Were I of a more convertible disposition than I am, I should have been won by the preacher's eloquence to a complete assurance that I had not two chances in a thousand of escaping eternal damnation after death. The odds are long, but they seemed to me enough, sinner though I am.

Add to these comparative deprivations the fact that there are

no French cooks in Aberdaron, and that my meals were eked out methodically between eggs and bacon, tea, bad beer, and the potted contents of the general store of the village, and you might suppose I was not at all happy, but was rather of my own free will suffering penance for some notable misdeed.

That, however, were a very erroneous view of the matter. Even Aberdaron and its roughnesses were entertaining—for a time. But Aberdaron was only the stake to which I had tied my tether, and to which I reverted towards nightfall when I had had a surfeit of the cliffs and gorse hills and primrosy lanes of the neighbourhood. I never heard so many larks sing at once as here, over the fields east of the hills which end the Peninsula. I never smelt so sweet an open-air perfume as that from the hyacinths on the sloping meadows under the lee of the great turf walls which here divide property from property. I will not say I never saw fairer prospects than that from the Anelwog mountain (some seven or eight hundred feet high) which falls precipitously towards the western sea; but it would not be gross exaggeration if I did say so. Thus the three noblest of the senses were satiated; this, too, under a warm May sky, with caressing zephyrs from the Atlantic, and a pleasurable feeling that, had I tried ever so, I could hardly anywhere in the realm have got more effectually away from 'the madding crowd' without crossing the sea.

Was it a wonder that when I had made myself drowsy with the scented air, and had seen the sun vanish beneath the transfigured Atlantic, I was not in the humour to find fault inordinately with poor little Aberdaron for lacking theatres and concert-halls—for being, in short, the vacuous, somnolent little village it is?

But another object of interest must be mentioned. From Anelwog, and much more from the extreme cliffs of Braich-y-Pwll, Bardsey seems very near to the mainland. It really is only about two miles from Braich-y-Pwll. But there is no port here. From Aberdaron the island is about five miles—of roughish current, which very little wind makes the mariners of the village shake their wise heads at.

It is rather a sacred and mysterious little isle, this of Bardsey. I had been led to believe its inhabitants were as irreproachable as if they were in Paradise. This illusion was dispelled one evening. A sudden noise of voices broke into the house from the domestic—not the shop—entrance. The shrill tones of women clashed with the deep and very thick broken utterances of a man. They talked,

or rather clamoured, Welsh, so I had no conception what was in the wind. Curiosity was not to be resisted. I left my room and saw my pretty milliner, her mother, and the maid-servant all heavily impelling up the narrow stairs an aged man whose white hair tossed almost to his shoulders, and whose semicircle of snowy whiskers and beard made him look like Moses or Abraham in the picture-books. The man was loth to ascend, and resisted. But the women all had him hard in the small of the back and declined to give way. Thus they urged him to the first floor and into a bed-chamber, where he collapsed immediately upon a bed. They locked the door and left him, heedless of his monstrous cries for a supper to consist of roast beef, porridge, and tea.

This was a Bardsey islander over for the day, or the week, as the weather might please. He was a relation of the shop, but had spent his best hours at one of the inns. This same venerable reveller astonished me on the stairs the next morning by greeting me civilly in English, and wondering (in a dubious manner) if he could have a soda-and-brandy. They sent him up a teacupful of milk instead.

Bardsey is the property of Lord Newborough, who owns so much territory in the north-west of Wales. It is a possession full of honour, if we are to believe the accepted tradition that twenty thousand saints lie buried in it. The lord of the isle has erected a monument to their memory in the precincts of the old ruined Abbey; nor does he reduce the number of them by a single one. At first sight you might doubt the island's ability to hold the bones of so many mortals; but really it has a circumference of about three miles, which, manifestly, may suffice. The modern islanders are, as they ought to be, a byword of integrity and sobriety at home; but perhaps it is a pity the righteous influence of their native place does not cling to them more effectually when they are away from it.

This legend of Bardsey's saints demands explicit recognition. Out of question, there is a measure of truth in it. The ruins or the Abbey at this day are a witness to the importance of the little island many centuries ago. The Abbey has been associated with Dubricius, Archbishop of Caerleon, who died in Bardsey in A.D. 522. Rather less than a hundred years later occurred that outrage by King Ethelred upon the monks of Bangor-is-coed in Flintshire, which seems to have spread panic among the Christians of the northern part of the Principality. These disestablished

believers fled to Anglesey in thousands. Many of their names are preserved for us in the names of the churches which succeeded the remote hermitages in which they ensconced themselves. Llanflewyn, Llanbeulan, Llanrhwydrys, &c., are but the churches of Flewyn, Beulan, Rhwydrys—holy men who never expected thus to go down the avenue of time memorialised for posterity. But the monks also fled down the Carnarvon Peninsula, striving to get as far as possible from the cruel hands of the Pagan marauders. They were stopped temporarily by the reddish cliffs of Braich-y-Pwll.

On a level plateau of grass and heather here where the land looks towards Bardsey, only two miles away (though with a strong tide between), and about a hundred and fifty feet above the sea, there may still be discerned the outline of an embanked enclosure within which buildings formerly existed. This locally goes by the name of Eglwys Fair, or Our Lady's Chapel. That is all that tradition tells us on the subject. It may have been a chapel like those so common in the south of Europe on marine headlands—beacons of hope and safety for Christian sailors; or merely a place of pilgrimage. But also it may have been founded and supported by these exiled 'religious' from Bangor-is-coed *en route* for Bardsey. It is enough that it is there. We may frame various interesting conjectures about it. For my part, I would fain imagine that the chapel of Our Lady of Braich-y-Pwll had a considerable existence and was incorporated with a monastery; and, further, that after the death of the successive inmates they were ferried over the flood to their last resting-place in Bardsey. It is quite credible that a thousand or two of the Bangor-is-coed monks and their Christian flock sheltered and died in the island, even though common sense puts the question, 'How could they exist here ere they died?' With the dead bodies of these Christians and those of the monastery of Our Lady of Braich-y-Pwll we may readily justify the later chroniclers (who were seldom good at arithmetic) in telling of the twenty thousand Bardsey saints.

Thus may be explained this unique characteristic of the little island. The subject has been provocative of a host of scoffs—so much so that the islanders themselves have given up defending their country's reputation in the matter and shake their heads with the majority. But it does not deserve to be smothered in ridicule as a mere lying tale.

The modern folk of Bardsey cannot but be influenced more or

less by the halo that is about their land. They are a simple, law-abiding community—the women in particular being engagingly ignorant about events in the great world of which they are a part, though a small one. They have not much to commend them to admiration externally. Constant exposure gives them very tawny complexions, and though they have strength they have few of the graces that on the mainland often accompany strength. They are thick-limbed, heavy-featured, and rather dull to the eye. But all this is of scant account to their discredit in comparison with the homely virtues that are certainly theirs. A person of experience could recognise them at a glance as inhabitants of a remote island.

Among the men, not a few have travelled far and wide as sailors and fisherfolk ere settling down on this gorse-clad rock. They find the island thoroughly congenial. It is a sort of compromise for them. They are on dry land, and yet it is as if they were on the ocean that has endeared itself to them. You would expect these superannuated mariners to be rather heedless of the dangers attendant upon the sea and its currents. In the Faroe Islands and elsewhere there is an annual and relatively large mortality due to storms and capsize. But here at Bardsey years pass and there is no death from natural or accidental causes. The islanders are not to be bribed to cross to Aberdaron or from Aberdaron when the weather is risky. A sovereign or two more or less can make but little difference to their material prosperity, and they seem sufficiently philosophic to perceive it. Much more to their taste is it to stand at the doors of their cottages and prattle about past times. These travelled ones talk very passable English, though they interlard it with Welsh mannerisms which may well make the Londoner smile. They have adventures enough to relate about storms and fanatic foreigners; nor does it signify overmuch that they strain at the long-bow to excite the interest of the ladies. There is something taking about the hard-featured but placid old fellows, with their lurching gait, fluent if rather laboured speech, and their simple clay pipes in which they smoke the disagreeable black tobacco of the mainland.

I hope this little paper may have shown, as I meant it to show, that with all its crudity and defects the Lleyn is not at all a bad place for a holiday. It certainly affords in full measure those two best features of a profitable change of residence: novelty and a good air. In summer one can endure with smiles a

certain amount of discomfort. Moreover, I doubt not I have made more of the failings of the Lleyrn folk than I need have done; while, on the other hand, a keener or more amiable visitor would probably discover in them a variety of virtues which the casual stranger does not discern in them.

I walked to Aberdaron from Pwllheli, but returned by the coach. This was an amusingly odd final experience of the ways of life in the Peninsula. We were packed so tight about the vehicle, even at the start, that there was a difficulty in breathing. This, however, was nothing to the afterwards. A variety of old ladies in archaic bonnets, with bundles and umbrellas, also young women in feathers, and males of all kinds stopped us in the lanes and must needs mount how and where they could. I never was so squeezed in all my days. The more obliging young men took the comelier of the maidens upon their knees. It was really false kindness, since it only enabled the driver to cram another old lady or two into our midst. Thus after a while we rattled along with people clinging upon all sides like limpets to a rock. Our horses were of the large, loose, lean kind, two white and two brown. For an hour it was quite laughable. Then it began to rain, and for the remaining three hours of the ride the heavens pelted us without mercy. Between us we absorbed so much moisture that the weight of the coach was considerably increased ere Pwllheli was reached. One of the old school of caricaturists would have made a very great deal of this eccentric vehicle and its picturesque freight. For my part, I bore a memento of the ride in the impress of a button which a stout farmer lady had driven as far into my arm as it would go. If she had been a criminal with the law at her heels, my arm could have given circumstantial evidence against her hours after we parted company.

CHARACTER NOTE.

THE CHILD.

‘Plus on aime, plus on souffre.’

BARBARA is six years old. She has stout cheeks, stout legs, and a temper. She has a sister called Pollie, who is sweet and seven, and a brother in button-up shoes and a frock. Pollie and Bab and Tom spend nearly all their days in the nursery. Mamma has a taste for society, and has not much time to play maternity.

‘Children are a great deal happier left to themselves,’ she says comfortably. Mamma is constantly announcing such convenient axioms, and believing them.

The children are indeed very happy by themselves. Bab particularly perhaps, because Bab has thoughts, and lives, with the dolls, in a fair world of her own. She has, perhaps, five-and-twenty children, who are dressed, taught, and amused, put to bed, and nursed through dire diseases. Matilda is the eldest of them. Matilda has black hair, large, beautiful staring eyes, and the loveliest vermilion complexion. She accompanies Bab everywhere. When Papa takes the children a trip in his yacht, Bab refuses, with much temper and firmness, to go without her child. Bab, lying prone on the deck, when the chops of the Channel have become too much for her inner woman, holds Matilda’s kid paw tightly in her own moist hand. She feels as if she were dying, but even in death she will not desert Matilda. Matilda’s perambulator has always to accompany the party. It is considered by Bab too precious to be packed up, and if she loses sight of it she roars.

Bab has indeed a fine pair of lungs, to which it must be confessed she gives plenty of exercise. The potency of her emotions will not allow her to weep gentle tears like Pollie. A rising colour in Bab’s fat face, and the slow opening of Bab’s particularly competent mouth, are perfectly reliable signals to Mamma to ring the bell and have Bab forcibly ejected from the room by a muscular nursery-maid.

In the nursery the children play at House. The enterprising Pollie is generally abroad catering for the family. Tom goes out hunting on the rocking-horse. But Bab sits at home surrounded

by her children. Sometimes they have to be corrected, but more often to be hushed and loved on Bab's maternal breast. Anyhow, they always need her. Her sense of responsibility is perhaps, in its childish way, as great as that of many real mothers. She has at least so far the true maternal feeling that, though she has so many children, she loves each as singly and devotedly as if she had but that one alone.

On Sundays the children play Church. Pollie, correct and officious in a night-gown, is the clergyman. Tom plays the organ on a penny whistle in a handy cupboard. Bab and the dolls form the congregation. At a certain signal, Bab causes Matilda to faint with a scream. And Tom removes the prostrate body with great zest and enjoyment. Tom and Pollie indeed sometimes forget the solemnity of the occasion and laugh. But Bab is always serious and tranquil. She is a mother. She has to set an example to the children.

'Bab thinks dolls is real,' lisps Tom.

'No, I don't,' says Bab, her face getting very red and holding Matilda very tight indeed. But it is a story. They are real—to her.

Bab reads. She reads all the books she can find, whether she understands them or not. She reproduces the long words she encounters in her conversation afterwards, with a perfectly original pronunciation and adapted to a meaning of her own.

Mamma says, 'What a queer child!'—a trifle scornfully. And Bab goes back to her book-world—so much simpler and easier than the real one—with that disparaging accent lingering somehow about her small heart.

Pollie is a much more successful child than Bab. Bab knows that Mamma thinks so. Bab thinks so herself. Pollie is very courageous, for instance. Pollie climbs trees in the garden—quite high trees. She puts her heroic countenance through the branches and calls to Bab, fat and timid, beneath: 'You're afraid.'

Bab says, 'No, I'm not. I don't want to climb trees. It's stupid,' with quite unnecessary vehemence. But in Bab's heart her greatest ambition is to be like Pollie in everything. Bab has indeed for Pollie one of those blind, faithful devotions which seldom survive childhood. Bab is not angry with Pollie for being so much prettier than she is herself. Bab thinks that Pollie, dressed in white muslin and a pink sash to go out to a party, is

just like an angel. Bab smooths Pollie's white silk legs with a small, reverent paw. She loves Pollie, and loves to see her beautiful.

Mamma likes Pollie best. Who could help it? It is at least a preference against which Bab herself makes no appeal. And if there is a little wistfulness in her fat face when Mamma kisses Pollie and looks at her with admiring eyes before she starts for the party, it is a wistfulness in which there is no shadow of bitterness or disloyalty to Pollie.

Bab sometimes goes to parties, too. Not very often, because Bab is not a party child or likely to do Mamma any particular credit. Bab outsits all the other guests at tea. She is calmly consuming her tenth piece of bread and butter in the dining-room long after the other children have retired to play games in the hall. When the lady of the house, affable and gracious, inquires if Bab has enjoyed herself, Bab replies with grave simplicity, 'A little, thank you, but not very much.'

Bab is, indeed, fatally honest. When she is sent down to the drawing-room to be looked at by the afternoon visitors, Bab surveys those visitors with so calm and direct a gaze as to sometimes quite embarrass them. No wonder Pollie is the show child. Bab is quite plain and fat and simple. She hugs Matilda and speaks the truth.

Mamma is never unkind to Bab. Bab has every opportunity of indulging a fine appetite for bread and butter. She is suitably clothed. When Mamma says Bab has a passionate temper and an obstinate will, Mamma is perfectly right. And Mamma is so constituted that she cannot love—particularly—a child who gives her trouble, and upon whose appearance and manners she is never complimented.

It happens, therefore, that Bab's small life has many dark moments. She does not understand exactly why Mamma is not fond of her. For herself, it is to the ugliest and forlornest of her children that her deepest tenderness goes out. A faded infant with a squint, and pale hair mostly pulled out by Tom, appeals by its very misfortunes to Bab's sweetest love and compassion.

When Mamma invites Pollie to go with her to evening church, Bab, standing unnoticed in the background, bursts into a terrible howl. It is not that Bab particularly wants to go to church, which has always seemed to her a dull function of unnecessary length. But she wants to be asked to go. The background is such a cold place in which to spend one's poor little life.

Bab strokes Mamma's delicate hand, not the less lovingly because her own little paw is grubby with recent excavations in the garden. And Mamma says sharply :

'Really, Bab, what have I told you about your hands? Go away directly, child!'

Bab forgives—is there any forgiveness like a child's?—a thousand sharp speeches and hasty words. But she does not forget, or repeat her small overtures of love and devotion.

Mamma teaches Bab music—for a week. She smacks Bab's fat stupid fingers when Bab, whose genius does not lie in the direction of music, is more exasperating than usual. She says hard things too, and Bab carries them away to a dull lumber-room where she is used to fight out her small tragedies alone. The lumber-room has a very narrow window, affording just a glimpse of sky. It has a very old carpet, whose faded pattern Bab has often studied dully through hot tears. Bab sits on a trunk, and rocks the forlorn doll to her heart. She does not know what is the matter with her life. Her griefs do not, indeed, last long. But while they last they are very bitter. And Tom's little button-up shoes patter up the staircase, and Tom, standing at the door in his insufficient frock, says—

'Don't cry, Bab. There's jam for tea, and Nurse is going to take us to see the postman's funeral.'

The prospect of jam or a funeral cheers Bab considerably. But she is too little to remember when troubles come again the next day, or the day after that, how soon and how simply they are consoled.

It happens that Pollie and Bab go to stay one summer with Mamma's sister-in-law. In-Law is not quite so young and so pretty as Mamma herself. Moreover, Mamma has married In-Law's favourite brother. It will therefore be readily understood that there is no love lost between the ladies.

In-Law takes to Bab very kindly. Bab, indeed, though not pretty like Polly, has a red healthful countenance and a comfortable person not unprepossessing. And In-Law has discovered that Bab is not Mamma's favourite. Bab, lying awake in her cot the first night and contemplating life through its green bars, overhears In-Law, who has come to kiss Bab in bed, say to a lady friend who is with her—

'Dreadful injustice, you know. Lena's favouritism makes one quite dislike her. This child—nothing, I assure you, and the other brought forward and indulged in every way.'

Bab does not know what this speech means at the time; later she finds out. In-Law is always giving Bab kisses and presents. Bab transfers the giant's share of each to Pollie.

'Auntie likes you best, Bab,' says Pollie, a little cloud on her pretty face.

'Does she?' says Bab wistfully, with a kind of apology to Pollie in her small voice.

No one, it seems, has ever liked Bab best before. Bab feels a little disturbed that it should be so now. But In-Law's preference remains manifest. In-Law asks Bab all about her home. They are taking a walk together, and Bab has been very conversational indeed.

'Is Pollie kind?' Pollie is very kind indeed. Pollie is clever too. She climbs trees and goes to a dancing class.

'Who does mamma like best—you or Pollie?' Bab's fat face grows a little serious. Mamma likes Pollie best. So does everybody. Pollie is pretty, and her hair curls. 'Mine is rats' tails,' adds Bab, regretfully.

'Do you like Mamma, Bab?' Bab's red cheeks grow redder.

'I like Mamma,' she answers sturdily. But after that, for no reason of which she knows, she likes In-Law less.

One day, in the garden, In-Law calls Bab to her. Pollie has gone out for a walk with Nurse, and Bab has been amusing herself with Matilda.

'I've had a letter from Mamma,' says In-Law; 'she wants Pollie home. She does not want you. What do you say to that, Bab?'

Bab does not say anything because she cannot. There is a large lump in her throat, and a great slow tear falls on Matilda's staring face.

'Mamma is cross to you, isn't she, Bab?' says In-Law insinuatingly.

A second tear falls on Matilda, but Bab says 'No, she isn't,' with a red passionate face, and pushes away In-Law's arm which is round her.

'But you would rather stay here, Bab? Mamma only loves Pollie and *is* cross to you, you know she is, and——'

And Bab, with a substantial boot, designed expressly for muddy country lanes, inflicts a fierce kick upon In-Law's ankle and bursts into a roar.

In-Law is laid up for three weeks. Bab has disgraced herself for ever. She is whipped, removed to the nursery, and allowed no jam. She is severely reprimanded several times a day by

Nurse for her wicked conduct to her kind aunt. Perhaps Bab has a private consolation in the depths of her own loyal soul. She thrives, anyhow, amazingly on jamless bread and butter. She croons Matilda contentedly to sleep. She is a little quieter than usual, but not unhappy. Then she is taken home, with Pollie. Mamma is in the hall, and Bab runs up to her. Bab's stout face is quite red with pleasure. She is less afraid of Mamma than she has been for a long time. Perhaps there is a sense of faith and loyalty in her heart which makes her bold. She knows In-Law has told Mamma the story. But then In-Law's version has been carefully revised.

'Bab, what a naughty girl you have been!' says Mamma. 'I'm ashamed of you.'

Mamma is kissing Pollie as Bab falls back blind with a sudden rush of tears. Pollie and the fuss of the arrival of luggage and nurses keep Mamma's attention. And Bab stumbles up unnoticed with heavy steps to the old lumber-room. She has not even the forlorn doll to clasp to her heart. But she has come perhaps to a grief in which even the dearest of her make-believe children could not console her. She has been true, has lied to keep faith, and her reward has missed her. She has hurt In-Law—who has, after all, been kind, and given her many sweets and kisses—for Mamma, who is only angry with her after all. Bab wipes away heavy tears with her black paw until her round face has dismal streaks on it, and is swollen and red. She traces blindly the worn pattern on the carpet with a wet forefinger. Her small figure is shaken by long-drawn sobs. Perhaps her grief is very much like a grown-up grief, after all, only she has not the reason and experience of age to help her in it. She has found out—too early—that the world is hard, and that love given does not mean love returned. And she sobs hot miserable sobs until she is tired out. Though everyone else has forgotten her, some tender Providence remembers her still, for when Nurse comes to fetch her to bed she is already asleep in the darkness, with stained cheeks, tumbled hair, and heavy breathing.

Who shall wonder that faith and love such as Bab's so seldom survive childhood? And yet there are some small loyal hearts in whom grown-up wisdom and prudence cannot destroy those better things which are revealed unto babes.

Perhaps Bab has such a heart as this.

And she is no longer a Child.

HACHISCH EATING.

WE were five comrades, seated on a circular divan around a richly served table. A pile of cushions was at the disposal of each, a circumstance which, joined to the unusual width of the divan, tended to favour at need a complete horizontal position.

The windows of the apartment, which was situated in the second storey of the Boulevard, were framed by the delicate verdure of acacias, while the whole front of the opposite house seemed lighted up by the reflection of the sun, which fell full on to these panes of glass. The blue of heaven, washed by a hasty shower which had fallen in the night, was almost as pure as that of an Italian sky. In short, one has rarely seen so beautiful a morning.

In each corner of the room where we were seated blossomed, in Japanese vases, enormous clusters of flowers; one was composed entirely of lilacs, a second of wallflowers, a third of hyacinths, and a fourth of hawthorn—that essential basis of the odour which accompanies the suave renewal of the vitality of the year.

Thanks to the emanations from these perfumes of Jouvence, the spring seemed to filter and permeate through all our pores. One felt proud and happy to be of this world; one appreciated the bounty of the God who created us, with all our accessories, and, with one's heart teeming with gratitude, one felt a sort of confused need to give a penny to a beggar, and even a vague desire to become virtuous.

The breakfast, which had been the means of bringing us together, was not, as our readers have foreseen, an ordinary breakfast. Scarcely were we seated when two lackeys entered the room, one carrying a quaintly chased silver coffer, which he placed on the table before our host and his master, the celebrated Dr. M——; the other bore a tray on which were placed tiny cups of Turkish coffee, in their outer cups of filigree silver.

The doctor drew the coffer towards him and gravely opened it. He took therefrom several small boxes of rock crystal, one of which was half full of a greenish sort of compound.

'Here,' said he, 'we have the substance in question in all its possible forms—in powder for the Narghily smoker, in an oily extract, in a spirituous one, and even cleverly disguised in sweets

and conserves. It is under the latter cloak that I recommend it to you as being more pleasant to swallow; its taste is sufficiently agreeable when prepared with pistachio nuts, like that which I procured yesterday. Here,' he said, producing a second box, 'is some which came from Alexandria twelve years ago; it has lost nothing of its strength, but has become somewhat rancid. As to the pure extract,' said he, opening another box which held a blackish-green substance, 'a pill of the usual size would be a sufficient dose.'

Coffee—which it is usual to drink at the same time—tends to ameliorate and develop the effects of the drug, which effects would be uncertain, and might be null, if the hachisch were not taken on an empty stomach.

'And is it long before one is under its influence?' inquired a guest.

'Ordinarily in about three-quarters of an hour, but I have seen some rare instances where it has only acted on the following day, and then it burst forth with extreme violence.'

'Is the effect always agreeable, doctor?'

'On the contrary, it is often most disagreeable, but is always excessively curious. At other times,' continued the doctor, 'it produces exquisite enjoyment—it is either paradise, or the infernal regions. In short, it is with hachisch as with play, one gains often, but one may lose.'

'But how do you account for these opposite effects from the same drug?'

'Oh, as to that, it may depend on divers circumstances which it is difficult to determine—the dose, the temperament of the individual, the electricity of the atmosphere, the phase of the moon. For instance, when the moon is at her apogee, I feel certain that the effect produces a greater shock.'

'You believe then in the influence of this planet?'

'Most assuredly. Do you wish for one proof of its action? If you plant garlic when the moon is in the full, the root will be round like an onion, instead of its being composed, as it usually is, of several *cloves*. Any gardener will tell you this. As to the action of the moon on individuals, that is undeniable.'

'Does one run no risk, or danger, by using this drug?'

'By some learned men it is asserted to be quite innoxious, but it would be difficult for me to share their conviction, for I think that a too frequent use of it would induce cerebral congestion,

and certainly the pitiable condition of those individuals who are given up to this passion, seems to me sufficiently instructive. But I believe that one may occasionally use it without any marked ill effect. I, who am speaking to you, have taken it close on two hundred times, and I am none the worse for it. Even if disagreeable experiences *do* follow, they are, I repeat, so very curious that he who has not exposed himself to them, once at least, can scarcely say that he has lived. And now, gentlemen, if you please, let me offer a dose of hachisch to each of you.'

So saying he gave to us a small teaspoonful of the conserve.

'Doctor,' said I, 'as I wish to be completely under the influence of the drug, will you please to increase the dose for me?'

'If you wish it I will do so. There, you can take that quantity with impunity, I often give double such a dose to my patients.'

'To your patients?'

'Without doubt, hachisch is often given with marked success in cases of mental alienation; it is useful in nervous affections, and is a sovereign remedy for epilepsy.'

Here the servants brought in the different dishes, and as our host has the reputation of being a *gourmet*, it is needless to say that the breakfast was exquisite. We were also surrounded with agreeable objects to look upon, so that our impressions might be influenced by pleasant pictures.

Each and all did honour to the repast, and, during quite a good half-hour, I felt nothing in any way abnormal, but when the meal was drawing to its close, a subtle warmth, which came as it were in gusts to my head and chest, seemed to permeate my body with a singular emotion. Later on the conversation around me reached my understanding charged with droll significance. The noise of a fork tapped against a glass struck my ear as a most harmonious vibration. The faces of my companions were transformed. The particular animal type—which, according to Lavater, is the basis of every human countenance—appeared to me strikingly clear. My right-hand neighbour became an eagle; he on my left grew into an owl, with full projecting eyes; immediately in front of me the man was a lion; while the doctor himself was metamorphosed into a fox.

But the most extraordinary circumstance was, that I read, or seemed to read, their thoughts, and penetrate the depth of their intelligence, as easily as one deciphers a page printed in large

type. Like an experienced phrenologist, I could indicate accurately the force and quality of their endowments, and the nature of their sentiments; in this analysis I discovered affinities and contrasts which would have escaped one in a normal state.

Objects around me seemed, little by little, to clothe themselves in fantastic garb, the arabesques on the walls revealed themselves to me in rich rhymes of attractive poesy—sometimes melancholy, but more generally rising to an exaggerated lyricism, or to transcendent buffoonery.

The porcelain vases, the bottles, the glasses sparkling on the table, all took the most ludicrous forms. At the same time I felt creeping all around the region of my heart a tickling pressure, to squeeze out, as it were, with gentle force, a laugh which burst forth with noisy violence.

My neighbours, too, seemed subjected to an identical influence, for I saw their faces unfold like peonies—victims of boisterous hilarity, holding their sides and rolling about from right to left, their countenances swollen like Titans!

My voice seemed to have gained considerable strength, for when I spoke it was as if it were a discharge of cannon, and long after I had uttered a sentence I heard in my brain the reverberation, as it were, of distant thunder.

Thoughts seized on me with fury, and unchained and disentangled themselves by torrents in my brain, and developed a rapid succession of geometrical combinations which appeared to be the simplest, as well as the most exact, expression of those ideas which one is obliged to render in an approximate manner by prolix words of gross moulding. I should have liked to fix on paper these fugitive figures of my *visible* thoughts, but the rapidity of their succession absolutely excluded me from this complicated operation. My head became as it were the burning source of fireworks, throwing up bouquets of stars, in dazzling forms, but of perfect design, of a light so intense and of colours so brilliant that nothing in nature had ever equalled them.

My brain was doubtless the theatre of this prodigious spectacle, but in virtue of the particular excitement under which I laboured, this *internal* vision showed itself *exteriorly* with all the clearness of a diorama.

I felt, in short, what those who are afflicted with sensorial maladies feel, with this difference, that *my* hallucinations, instead of persisting like theirs, must naturally cease after the full diges-

tion of the drug which had produced them. My brain bubbled like a locomotive in which there is too much fire, and carried me rapidly through infinite space, where I perceived at each moment a new perspective.

Besides all this, I lost completely the idea of *time*, and should have been incapable of deciding whether my hallucination was of a minute's, or of a century's, duration.

The same uncertainty held good with regard to size, so that I could hardly establish the difference betwixt an egg shell and the cupola of the Pantheon. However, as the action of hachisch is intermittent, I gradually came back to my own identity, and believing that the effect of the drug was exhausted, I thought it time to withdraw myself, and leave to their respective dreams my companions, who were too much absorbed to trouble themselves at my departure. But scarcely had I set foot on the pavement outside the house, than the effect of the drug, which had in a measure subsided, seized upon me again with redoubled force.

Here words utterly fail me to express the incomprehensible agony which ran through all my being! Sometimes I felt that my feet took root in the earth, and that I was sinking up to my neck in the soil, and that I could only draw my feet out with the greatest difficulty, each step seeming to have hundreds of pound weights attached to them.

Then I appeared to be gifted with the lightness of a sponge, and I remember that I held firmly on to a tree fearing that I should suddenly disappear in the air with the velocity of a balloon.

Vibrations, like shocks of electricity, ran through my body, and I was a victim to the most horrible sensations. An iron hand seemed to have got hold of my brain, and was crushing it; I was seized with dizziness, and I shudder even now when I think how intense was my suffering.

The horror of a man being flung from a precipice, of a martyr chained to the stake, and knowing that he would be consumed to cinders, may perhaps approach the terror which I experienced at this cruel period, and which seemed to be the length of eternity. I was in despair! I longed to fly from my proper self, and from this persecuting influence under which I was wholly powerless.

Shortly after this I began to feel myself growing tall, so immensely tall that I towered above the horizon, and my skull was even touching the blue roof of heaven!

It seemed as if the walls of the universe spread out around me, and that there issued therefrom strains of delicious music. This circumstance filled me with pleasure, and seemed to extinguish the anguish and terror with which I had been previously tortured.

I persuaded myself that I was divested of a material body, and became rapidly a divinity. He must have felt somewhat as I felt—this pagan, Cæsar—when he cried from his death-bed, ‘My friends, I feel that I am becoming a God!’

I now began to experience a voluptuous happiness, to which no human enjoyment could be compared; I floated in a sea of pleasure, at once physical, moral, and intellectual. I had an immensity of love in my heart which enveloped all nature, and filled me with unlimited hope.

Under such impressions—which seemed to endure for ages—I began to feel a sense of corporeal lassitude creeping over me, and as I approached a cab-stand I threw myself into a carriage, and requested to be driven along the Champs-Élysées.

Then began for me other and new visions. A series less grandiose, but much more amusing. It seemed to me that I had entered now in full possession of an existence *anterior* to that of my actual life—existence which consequently had nothing fresh for me, notwithstanding its strangeness. I entered into the embodiment of my personality, as one does after the repose of sleep.

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Some hours later these visions began to dissolve, and I felt an urgent necessity for food; entering a restaurant, I attacked with a voracious appetite all which was set before me, but I must not forget to add that what I ate and drank was of exquisite and unknown flavour—in comparison with which ambrosia and nectar would be but ordinary bread and sour wine.

On reaching my chambers I fell into a profound and peaceful sleep, and on the morrow nothing remained of the effects of the hachisch, save a pallid countenance, an agreeable languor, and a bitter sentiment of *regret* at the aspect of the *reality* to which I had awakened.

COLOUR-SERGEANT RHODES.

If two lives join, there is oft a scar,
 They are one and one, with a shadowy third;
 One near one is too far.

I.

MISS KITTY MALONE had tied up the last bunch of carnations which smelt like ripe apricots newly gathered. She had arranged as a row of footlights beneath her, many flower-pots holding calceolarias and tufts of the little creeping plant familiarly known as 'Creeping Jenny.' Above Kitty's fair head a gigantic bunch of sunflowers stood on a shelf, with attendant satellites in the shape of golden and bronze dahlias and orange lilies. Miss Malone shook some of the pollen that had fallen from the last-named plants off the creamy lace at her wrists; and then, after pinning one small nosegay of forget-me-nots among the pale blue folds of her dress, she sat down, like a Queen of the May among her garlands, and waited for customers.

The large hall was very empty, although the church clock had rung out four half an hour ago. A sense of disappointment weighed down the spirits of some two dozen ladies, who, with business-like muslin aprons and scissors fastened at their waists, cast impatient eyes at the great doorway, and over a few aimless strollers who had passed through it.

'It's ten thousand pities,' said Miss O'Shaughnessy, who presided over pincushions and photograph frames under a canopy next to Miss Malone, 'that the Lord Lieutenant found at the last moment he couldn't open the sale.' She spoke with a suspicion of a brogue, and pronounced her *ens* like *uns*. Then she looked sideways and not altogether agreeably at Kitty.

Miss O'Shaughnessy had been a reigning beauty in her beloved native city until the last season, when Miss Malone had come over to stay with a barrister uncle in Merrion Square, and had calmly taken away most of Miss O'Shaughnessy's favourite partners and also her reputation as the prettiest girl at the balls and race-meetings. It could not be said that Kitty seemed elated overmuch after her triumphs: on the contrary she received all admiration with a placid sense of its being no more than her due, and never exerted herself to win either attention or praise. Miss O'Shaughnessy's bitterness had reached its height a month or two

ago at a small dance when she had seen her rival led through a quadrille by the Lord Lieutenant, and taken in to supper by the Commander-in-Chief.

And just towards the close of that same memorable evening, slangy Colonel Haldane, who had formerly been Miss O'Shaughnessy's most devoted admirer, had lounged across the room, and merely said, 'Heard the news?'

'No, what is it?'

'Well, the lovely Miss Malone has settled to make some fellow happy at last. She's accepted Vincent Pelham—thundering good marriage, ain't it? Capital soldier, old Vincent, though a bit dull. But his father ain't likely to hang on long, and then he'll come into no end of "oof." Are you surprised?'

Miss O'Shaughnessy was dressed in sea-green, and her draperies just then were too much like the colour of her skin to be becoming. She spoke after a second, in a very hoarse voice:

'I wonder how Lord Ryde will like his son's marriage. As he's so ill, I am afraid it may upset him a good deal. Because though dear Kitty is of course *charming*, some of her relations are not quite—*quite*, don't you know? And of course there was that rumour about her and an army doctor, you remember?'

Miss Malone passed the pair just then on her *fiancé's* arm. He was a tall man, undeniably handsome, in spite of a too-long neck and a head of a sugarloaf shape. He wore a heavy moustache, closely cropped, his eyes were grey, and a little unsympathetic. His smile, although at first sight pleasant, clearly expressed a consciousness of his own personal uprightness, and of his perfectly unblemished and prosperous career in the past, together with the least shade of contempt for other people who might happen to have stumbled or fallen on less easy roads. Miss Malone looked as usual perfectly calm and unelated. Her soft cheeks were hardly flushed, her dark lashes did not rest upon them with a newly acquired sense of shyness, on the contrary her blue eyes gazed frankly and unconcernedly at her many friends and acquaintances. Her full red underlip did not quiver with emotion, but was merely parted from the curling upper one in a quiet smile. Kitty Malone was clever enough to ignore the envious or admiring glances that ran like lightnings over her slight figure—and apparently all-untouched by them, she walked up the whole length of the ball-room, with the confident and erect Captain Pelham at her side.

Now, sitting behind her barrier of pincushions and pen-wipers, Miss O'Shaughnessy thought bitterly over this past scene. And the unconscious object of her gloomy meditation was smiling among a mass of ferns and blossoms, and giving a little girl directions about how she was to take button-holes round the room and try to sell them to any gentleman she might see. Mrs. Dowse, who presided over the tea and buns, and the weak claret and champagne cups, crossed over to the flower-stall for a minute.

'And are ye expectun Captain Pelham here to-day, my dear?'

'No, Mrs. Dowse, he has had to go over to England to see his father, who is ill. See, there is some one looking at your stall! They will pass on if you don't go back.'

Mrs. Dowse, fat and smiling, was behind her jugs and glasses in an instant.

'How I wish,' said Miss Kitty to one of her helpers, 'that some one of some slight interest would come! We are selling for such a good object. Think of the poor soldiers having to leave their wives in a few days, and probably nearly all to be killed, or to die of fever in the horrible deserts! You see those married without leave will be . . . Oh! Jenny, there *are* some soldiers coming in now! They are stopping at Nora O'Shaughnessy's stall. What use can an antimacassar or an illuminated text be to a soldier?'

'Well, they are not allowed to wear button-holes, and as they sail in four or five days, plants in pots won't be much use to them either.'

'Perhaps not. What a good-looking man that tall one is, with the three gold stripes on his sleeve, and the crimson sash.'

'Yes, a sergeant. And the fair man is a corporal. Oh! Kitty, how sad to think they'll probably be shot. How dreadful for you, dear, that Captain Pelham has got that staff appointment!'

'Ah! well, I wish him to get on. I am very ambitious, my dear Jenny.'

The sergeant and Miss O'Shaughnessy were apparently amused with one another. He laughed, showing a row of very white teeth, and looked the young lady over from head to foot with a pair of reckless dark eyes. A couple of dowdily dressed ladies came up just then to Miss Malone's stall, and after five minutes' quibbling about prices, walked off in triumph with one little fern

for sixpence and a bunch of pinks for a penny. Kitty stood on a step, readjusting her flower-pots, her slender arms raised above her head, which was thrown a little backward. As she turned round something scarlet caught her eye. The young sergeant was standing facing her, tapping the edge of the stall lightly with his cane. His glance lingered on Kitty's slender form, taking in every detail of its grace and charm; the sky-blue dress with its broad sash, the shady black hat resting on her light brown hair. In the words of a far more famous sergeant he might well have said—'Thank you for the sight of such a beautiful face.' His eyes, however, told her as much, and the faintest pink flush overspread Miss Kitty's neck and her soft cheeks.

'I am afraid,' said the sergeant, taking up a large bouquet of shaded carnations, 'that you have fewer people at your sale than you expected?'

It was a commonplace remark, but Miss Malone started. The voice was that of a gentleman, and equally so the easy grace of his manner.

'Yes, indeed,' she answered. 'It's most disappointing. And one would have thought just now that so much sympathy would have been felt with the wives and children of our soldiers who are going to fight.'

The sergeant was leaning forward on the counter, his cane under one arm, his eyes fixed on the young girl's fair face. She, for her part, noted how exactly his uniform fitted his square shoulders and thin waist, how well his cap with its shining badge became him.

'Ah! I am afraid the inhabitants of this town don't feel any sorrow at our departure,' he said. 'We are not very much beloved here. For my part, I rejoice to get away.'

'Have you seen service before?'

'Oh, no. Now is my chance.' She fancied he sighed a little.

'It's no use my offering you any of my lovely roses?' And the girl held up a large bunch on which the dew seemed hardly dry. The sergeant took them from her hand and smelt them.

'Alas! no. They are no good to me. I can't carry a nosegay about in the streets. Ah! there are some people coming to buy flowers. I am taking up your time?'

'Not in the least, I assure you.' And Kitty Malone actually blushed as she met once more the earnest gaze of those reckless dark eyes.

'The sale will go on this evening, won't it?'

'Oh, yes; it will all look much prettier lighted up. And there will be coloured lamps in the little garden at the back, where the gipsy sits, telling fortunes.'

'A fortune teller?—a genuine gipsy?'

'Well, no; I'm afraid only a friend of mine dressed up. But she's very clever all the same. Why don't you have your fortune in this war foretold?'

'Ah!'—and he certainly did sigh this time, there was no mistake about it—'my fortune is told long ago.'

'But think of what may happen to you in Egypt. Oh, I beg your pardon, Lady Celbridge. Which would you like of these lilies—these orange ones or the lovely variegated ones above?'

'Look at Kitty!' murmured Miss Nora O'Shaughnessy to her sister. 'What a flirt she is! She even allowed that sergeant to stand and make eyes at her!'

'But we agreed just now that he was certainly a gentleman.'

'Yes, but it is so often scamps who enlist—men whose fathers will have nothing more to say to them.'

A band at the far end of the room began to play, and more people to troop in through the heavy doors. Mrs. Dowse was becoming crimson and hilarious over her urns and jugs of orangeade. The sergeant stopped at her stall and drank some champagne-cup. Then he glanced over his shoulder at the flower-stall and the little blue figure among the blossoms, and began to pace slowly round the great hall. A counter with some photographs attracted his attention. The owner, a lady who was a great admirer of Miss Malone, had fastened one of this young lady's portraits in a plush frame. The sergeant stopped.

'How much for this?' he asked carelessly.

'Oh, the photo of the lovely Miss Malone?'

'Exactly.'

'Well, ye can have ut for foive-and-six.'

The soldier paid the money, and the stall-keeper tied up the parcel.

'Put into a raffle, please, sergeant!' said a childish voice at his side.

He looked round and smiled pleasantly at a little girl carrying a large cushion representing in woolwork Joseph and all his Brethren.

The sergeant laughed. 'I'll take two tickets, if you like.'

'And where shall I send it if you win?' asked the child.

Colour-Sergeant Rhodes, . . . Barracks. But no, stay—it's no use to me; keep it for yourself if I win.'

When he had arrived at the end of the room the young soldier turned his head once more. He fancied that those large blue eyes behind the roses were actually watching him, and his thin brown cheeks grew a shade redder.

Towards seven o'clock the hall was lighted up, and, to the delight of the sellers, was at last thronged with townspeople. Miss Kitty had changed her blue dress for a cooler one of white muslin, with a fresh bunch of forget-me-nots pinned at her breast. By nine o'clock her stall bore the appearance of a forsaken garden. Only a few straggling plants which had been earlier in the day relegated to the back rows remained. Every bunch of carnations and each neatly made button-hole was sold. And Kitty thought that, considering the assiduous way in which she had worked, and the now stifling atmosphere of the room, she would allow herself a breath of fresh air in the garden. A few groups of dark figures stood on the gravel-path among the little twinkling red and green lights. The air was soft and cool, the sky of a dark velvety blue, with pale stars coming out. Round the little tent where the supposed gipsy sat some dozen people were standing, and among them Kitty saw a tall slight figure dressed in scarlet. One of the fairy lights illuminated the three gold stripes on his arm. As if owing to some magnetic influence the soldier turned his head sharply round as she advanced, and once more their eyes met, this time in a longer glance. The soft languorous air crept round Kitty, rustling her white skirts and lifting the curls on her forehead. She trembled a little. The sergeant came towards her, his scarlet figure standing out vividly against the dark background of wall.

'So you've come back!' said Kitty Malone.

'So it seems. Years ago I should not have thought that a sale and a sham gipsy would amuse me; but as I am so soon leaving England—perhaps for always—one takes a different view of things.'

He came and stood beside her in the curious uncertain light. The pale stars were not bright enough to lift the shadow off their faces; the fairy-lights threw odd little violet and green reflections upon her skirt and the red stripes on his trousers.

'Have you had your fortune told?'

'Not I. Nothing good is likely to happen to me ever again.'

'Why not? You might get a commission one of these days, and end as a general.'

They moved a little farther into the shadow.

'Only dreams!' he said. 'But I loathe talking of myself. Are you interested in this Egyptian business or in anyone going out?'

They were almost in darkness now, so that if Kitty Malone had blushed the young sergeant would have been none the wiser.

'No.'

Kitty's thoughts travelled remorsefully for one instant beyond her companion, and her mental vision was confronted by an eminently gentlemanly face poised on an ungainly neck. But although she was about to make the most prosaic of marriages—to join her lot to that of an entirely respectable and dull elder son of a rich peer—she had inherited with her Celtic blood a foolish craving for romance. Anyone as pretty as she was could have had no lack of lovers, but one and all had failed to bring her the excitement, the passionate desires, for which she sometimes longed. Here, in this dimly lighted garden—so dully commonplace at the noonday, but glorified for an hour or so by the mysterious stars and the distant sound of music—she felt for once strangely touched and moved.

'Miss Malone,' said the sergeant suddenly, 'you are extremely good to talk to me. For four—yes, five years no lady has said a word to me. I feel very much alone sometimes.'

'Indeed, I can understand that. But there are other men of your own class in your battalion with whom you can make friends?'

'Yes, now and then. But I know I have gone down hill. Not owing to the company of the men—no, I don't mean that, they are far better fellows, many of them, than I; but if one never sees a woman of one's own class one becomes coarser in tastes and pleasures, harder also and more cynical. You have done me good, and I thank you, even if we should never meet again.'

'But we *may* meet some day. Anyhow, I will come and see your ship start.'

'Will you?' And he drew a little nearer to her. 'You are very kind to me.'

'How did you know my name?'

'I found it out. And I have—no, never mind.'

'You must tell me yours in return.'

'Sergeant Rhodes.' He paused a minute. 'That is the name I shall always be known by.'

They walked slowly round the narrow garden, the distant music sounding in their ears—passionate, plaintive, tender. Then they came to a wooden bench, under a stunted tree. For an hour or more these two sat on, learning so much, and yet, alas! so little about one another. A church clock sounded. The music stopped suddenly. From a neighbouring garden a white cat leapt over the wall, the moon shining on its fur. The music had ceased, and the world seemed to have grown sadder and more silent. Kitty Malone sprang to her feet.

‘Oh! how late it is! What will my uncle say, and my friends who were to have taken me home? Good-bye, Sergeant Rhodes.’ She held out her little hand. The moonshine quivered on his pale handsome face—on the band of his cap and the scarlet and gold of his uniform. He looked at her long with the dark eyes which had grown graver now, and less reckless.

‘Will you give me the bunch of forget-me-nots you wear in your dress?’

For a moment there flashed across Miss Kitty’s romantic mind a memory of the beautiful American ballad telling of the lady who flung a rose down from her balcony as the column of war-worn men marched by. She trembled a little, but she took out the flowers, and he hid them away in his breast.

When Kitty came back alone, a few minutes later, the great hall was nearly deserted. Mrs. Dowse was yawning heavily over her emptied urns, and the O’Shaughnessys had gone home. Miss Malone felt very much ashamed of herself, but alas! more joyous than penitent. In her tremor of excitement she hardly realised yet that she had been behaving in a foolish, and, to say the least of it, a very unconventional way—in a manner which Lady Celbridge, her future husband’s ideal of all that a lady should be, would have stigmatised as ‘bad form;’ she only knew that she had been strangely happy, for one evening, although to-morrow her folly might cause her twinges of regret and mortification.

And perhaps into the heart of a man, reckless and dissipated enough, but a gentleman still, now lying awake in his narrow bed within blank barrack walls, she had brought some short glimpses of hope and retrieval—possibilities of redemption which, even if they should not develop into maturity, might not have been born entirely in vain.

II.

‘My dear Kitty, it is very foolish and emotional of you to wish to see the troop-ship start. You will probably be quite overcome, all the more so’—and here Captain Pelham patted his betrothed’s curly head—‘as we—we, my darling, shall so soon too have to say good-bye to one another.’

Vincent could never entirely divest himself of a certain stiffness of manner, even when he was most genuinely moved. His gestures, as, bending over her, he stroked Kitty’s hair, were also a little stilted.

Miss Malone looked him straight in the face, and smiled, half sadly.

‘You needn’t be afraid I shall break down or disgrace you on this or any other occasion, Vincent. I really *do* wish to see the poor men sail. Lady Celbridge is going also.’

‘That is quite a different thing. She has a young nephew bound for Egypt. Now there is no one in whom *you* are interested. Therefore I must continue to say I think it a little morbid of you, my dear Kitty.’

Captain Pelham straightened himself, stroked his moustache with both hands—his favourite habit, and allowed the subject to drop.

But it came about that two days afterwards Kitty Malone, seated on an outside car, with Lady Celbridge as her companion, drove to the station on a sunny, cloudless morning, sat silently for half an hour in the train, and then with rather flushed cheeks and shining eyes, walked with her friend to the wharf.

Her glance fell on scores of soldiers in helmets and serge tunics, many of them with laughing, boyish faces, almost all trying to look as if they had at last attained the one desire of their hearts, and here and there on a woman with swollen eyes and lips shut tight as if to prevent any expression of emotion. There were endless bales of luggage littered on the stones, horses about to be slung on board, careless and interested spectators getting in each other’s way, talking, advising, gesticulating. Captain Vincent was already on the wharf, erect, self-satisfied, and well-dressed as usual. He advanced towards the two ladies.

‘Well, Lady Celbridge, shall I go now and find your young man for you?’

‘I wish you would! Dear boy, perhaps they would allow him

to come to the hotel with me for a little while, and have a talk? He is my poor sister's only son, and I have been like a mother to him. Can I leave you here, dear Kitty? I thought I would go with kind Captain Pelham and find the boy, to save time. You have lots of friends, I know, here. Yes, there are the Staceys and the Egertons, stay with them if you like.'

Miss Malone's eyes were dazzled by the glare of the sun, and by her constant efforts to discern a figure that was familiar to her among the red tunics. She knew that when the men were embarked, all would be over, and her last chance gone. She strained her eyes till the tears almost started into them. It was so difficult to recognise people in those helmets that came so low over their foreheads. Suddenly, almost at her elbow, two sergeants passed by. The taller one, with the smart, upright figure, was he at last. He looked at her with the same lingering gaze that had attracted her before. But it left a different impression on her now. It seemed to imply reproach—was it even something stronger, disdain, contempt? Kitty Malone's cheeks were like white roses, as the young man, without making a sign of recognition, strode on towards the landing-place. Ah! he was a gentleman still, and he had never been introduced to her, she thought. He would not of course think it right to speak to her. But nevertheless her heart tightened strangely as she walked restlessly away to join her friends. Soon Vincent was back again, and at her side. She hardly heard his rather tedious explanations concerning the great ship lying now as if asleep in the sun.

'Would you like to come on board, Kitty?'

Yes, she would. And she followed her *fiancé* across the gangway. Under the blazing rays she stood impassive, while Vincent introduced her to officers and others of his acquaintance, a half-vacant smile on her lips, her eyes still wandering restless and aching over the herd of scarlet figures. Sergeant Rhodes was now standing some forty feet away, looking at her again. Kitty's cheeks burnt and her knees shook. She glanced at Captain Pelham—at this moment laying down the law to a young veterinary surgeon who had a vacuous face. In a second she had approached the sergeant, and was holding out her little hand. He hesitated, raised his own to his helmet, hesitated again, and took it in his.

'I have come to say good-bye,' said Kitty in the shaking voice of a child who has been punished.

'Ah!'

'It was *really* to see you I came. I wanted to—oh! it's so conventional to say, wish you luck, but you know what I mean!'

His eyes were only reckless to-day. They had lost the softer look that had come into them a few evenings ago for just an hour.

'Thank you, Miss Malone. And I wish you all joy in the future, too. For myself, if you ever think of me enough to form a desire for me, let it only be this, that I may never come home or see you more.'

'Oh! What have I done?'

The soldiers around her burst suddenly into a song. She started at the volume of sound.

Should auld acquaintance be forgot—

The familiar and pathetic words sung by these full, boyish voices cut her to the heart.

For auld lang syne, my dear,

For auld lang syne . . .

And when she turned her head, Sergeant Rhodes was gone.

Again, as the dusk was closing in, and Kitty and Lady Celbridge hurried down to the wharf once more, she saw him. But he was not looking at her this time. He was talking to a comrade, and laughing so loud, that she could see his white teeth through the dim light.

When the moon came out, and the clouds moved slowly, like great black birds, over the funnels and masts, she saw him once again. The silver light made his helmet seem almost dazzling, and his face look strange and blanched too. As the great ship got slowly under way, the soldiers took their caps and helmets off, and cheered as they waved them. And the pitiless moon smiled down upon the bare heads and boyish features, with the same callous stare with which she would perhaps watch them lying still more pale in the deserts far away across the sea; and instead of the black clouds drifting to-night every moment farther off, evil winged creatures would then draw closer and closer to faces upturned and rigid under the gaze of her cold eyes. A young man, with gold stripes upon his sleeve, suddenly pressed forward and leant over the side of the ship, and amid the noise of deafening cheers and stifled sobs upon the shore, his eyes flashed a last message to a woman who watched him go, a message that could never have been uttered in words even had the rushing seas not rolled between them.

III.

Miss KITTY's enemies—but, to do her justice, there were not many of these—acknowledged that she had wonderfully improved since the departure of Captain Pelham for Egypt. Lord and Lady Ryde, her future parents-in-law, wrote almost enthusiastically about her to other members of their family. Lord Ryde, whose hobbies were his own health and the results upon it of various patent medicines, thought her kindly and sympathetic; and Lady Ryde, whose mind was almost entirely absorbed in details concerning High Church ritual, found Kitty always ready to read aloud articles from her favourite controversial newspapers and to attend her to church at all hours.

Kitty's father, who had lived in London for years and lost almost every characteristic of the race from which he had sprung excepting a rather provoking tendency to the display of outward emotion, had always considered his daughter faultless. But even *he* was sensible of her increased gentleness of manner, her more fully developed powers of sympathy, her patient consideration towards the shortcomings of others. She was very sad and silent sometimes, but that was of course only to be expected during Vincent's absence. Mr. Malone was sincerely glad to see how romantically in love she was with her future husband.

Kitty and her father left London towards the end of July, and installed themselves for a few months in a little river-side house with a rose-garden and a tumble-down verandah. She never forgot the expression of her father's face one evening after the late newspapers had arrived. She came in and saw him standing by an open window, his hand shaking so that the sheets crackled, the tears running down his cheeks and the strangest triumphant smile lighting up his eyes at the same time.

He moved a few steps toward her, trembling still.

'Well, you're to marry a hero, Kitty, my darling! God bless him! See here!'—and he handed the crumpled newspaper to his child.

Her face grew stiff and white as she read an enthusiastic account of the heroic conduct of a Staff-officer, Captain the Hon. Vincent Pelham, who, although himself wounded, had carried away in his arms a sergeant who had been more severely hit. It was under a heavy fire, the paragraph went on to say, and there

was but little doubt that Captain Pelham would be recommended for the Victoria Cross, which he had so thoroughly deserved.

The following morning 'The Times' brought more news to the river-side cottage—fuller details of the episode which was of so great interest to its occupants—and this time the name of the sergeant who had been so dangerously wounded and only saved from death by the valour of her lover met Miss Malone's eyes. She had known by some strange instinct what it would be, and that evening, when she sat by her open window inhaling the perfume of a thousand roses and listening to the gentle lapping of the water against the banks, she wrung her hands tightly together, and said, half aloud:

'Oh, why is one man to have all, and the other nothing—nothing till he dies?'

IV.

IN the early spring Captain and Mrs. Vincent Pelham spent their honeymoon in a charming gabled house looking over wide downs and noble white cliffs in the Isle of Wight. The property belonged to an uncle of the bridegroom, and would in time, with many another good thing, become Vincent's own. The fresh breeze from the chalk slopes brought new roses to Kitty's cheeks, and they had been a little pale for some months past. People noted with admiration how much affected she had appeared at her husband's illness, how proud she was of his success. And, without doubt, she was striving earnestly to make him happy. She struggled to overcome the phases of melancholy to which she was sometimes subject, to take an interest in many matters, dull enough as they seemed to her, because they made up part of his life. And Vincent, if at times in his inmost heart he was a little mortified at her apparent indifference to the extreme good fortune that was hers, could not but acknowledge that she was sweeter and gentler than when he had first won her, and that she had lost the slight tinge of flippancy that had sometimes annoyed him against his will. The pair had come into the garden one sunny evening after a long walk by a white precipice which stands gigantic and perpendicular out of the slate-coloured sea. Mr. Malone had just arrived to pay a visit of a few days to his children, and was in a sentimental and extremely happy condition. He sat in a low chair and awaited them as they came sauntering over the downs, their figures silhouetted against the purple west. At Mr.

Malone's feet and all around him were large flower-beds of dazzling blue forget-me-nots, brighter than the distant sea, and the faint azure patches in the eastern heavens. Kitty came up to her father, and, throwing one slender arm about his neck, kissed him lovingly.

'It is so nice to have you with us, papa dear.'

'And nicer still for me to be with my children. My little girl and her hero.'

Captain Pelham began making holes in the gravel with his walking-stick. He was more of a gentleman than his father-in-law, and had an almost morbid dislike to hearing allusions to his past acts of daring, references which were always coupled with a smile of triumph from his father-in-law. Mr. Malone would have been unable to appreciate such fine gradations of feeling. He, for his part, delighted in recurring again and again to the war and its episodes, and in pestering Vincent with questions. After tea had been drunk out of doors, the good old man again referred to his favourite topic.

'And what has happened now, Vincent, my dear boy, to the sergeant, poor fellow, whose life you were so nobly the means of saving?'

Kitty looked away at the glimmering white cliffs and the expanse of placid sea.

'Oh, poor fellow, he's at Netley still; just across the water over there. I'm afraid he's done for. It's hard luck, because he's a gentleman, and might have got a commission one of these days.'

There was a short silence; then a blackbird chirped loudly and flew over the lawn into the bushes, while the crescent moon came slowly into view over the cliffs. Kitty spoke in a hard, dry voice.

'Couldn't we go, Vincent, one day over to Netley, and see that poor man?'

'My dear child, what earthly use would it be? I *did* see him once or twice, you know. And he's thoroughly well looked after. You certainly have a morbid taste for gloomy things.'

'But it might be kind; don't you think so, papa? I—I should so like to take him some flowers.'

'Well, my dear, surely Vincent knows best. It would upset you, no doubt, to see all those poor fellows, sick and wounded.'

And the shadows crept silently over the garden, while the stars stole out over the ghostly white cliffs, glimmering far across the downs. Mr. Malone lighted his pipe, and Vincent began cheerfully to hum a few bars of a popular song.

V.

THE soldier at the end of the ward had not spoken for twenty-four hours.

'Sinking fast,' said the doctor to a Sister, who wore a spotless white apron and scarlet cape over her shoulders, and who had just left the bedside.

'I fear so.' Sister MacDonald's sweet face grew sad, and she sighed. She had felt very sorry for Colour-Sergeant Rhodes, and had nursed him tenderly during many dreary months of pain and discomfort. But she grieved less now that the indescribable blue shade was spreading at last over his face—that his eyes were shut, and the perspiration lying cold on his forehead. He was so lonely, and it was better that he should go, thought Sister MacDonald. Other men had friends to come and sit beside them—old and young women with tender and tearful eyes, and faithful hands to grasp theirs; but no one ever came to see Colour-Sergeant Rhodes, excepting now and then an officer or old comrade of his battalion. And lately even these had seemed to forget him.

When the post came in that evening, the Sister found, rather to her surprise, that there was one letter at last for her favourite sergeant. She took it up to his bedside. He was breathing heavily, and his hand, when she touched it, was very clammy and cold.

'A letter for you,' she said in a low voice.

He lifted his eyelids a little, but made no other movement.

'Shall I open the cover and give you the letter?'

His lips moved, and she tore open the flap. It contained no writing after all—not a word of greeting or good-bye—only a bunch of forget-me-nots, so fresh and blue that they must have been very lately gathered. A pair of dark eyes opened wide, and were fixed upon the Sister. The soldier raised his cold fingers, and she put the little blue knot of flowers within them; and with quivering lips looked away from the dying man. He tried to hide the nosegay in the breast of his crumpled shirt. Then his arm dropped upon the coverlet.

And when the last low sunrays smote the blank wall in front of Sergeant Rhodes' bed, he had passed where time and space exist not, and memory is, perhaps, by God's mercy, no longer the twin-sister of pain.

TOFT AND CROFT.

LANGUAGE is a vast conglomerate of human fossils. It consists for the most part of fossil forms, fossil beliefs, fossil conceptions, fossil ideas. In a vague sort of way, indeed, we are all of us more or less conscious of its immense antiquity, its half-forgotten implications, its surviving barbarism. We can often see that it enshrines, like flies in amber, strange fragmentary relics of earlier creeds, and sometimes even of savage or cannibal thought. Whenever we 'thank our stars' for any piece of good luck, are we not vaguely aware that we are implicitly proclaiming ourselves devout believers in mediæval astrology? Whenever we talk of a man as 'jovial,' or 'saturnine,' or 'mercurial,' or 'martial,' do we not half know in some faint background of consciousness that we thereby acknowledge the guiding influence of the planets upon human life, and implicitly make ourselves out worshippers of Jupiter, and Saturn, and Mars, and Mercury? And even when we speak of 'last Wednesday,' or of 'Thursday week,' may we not at times realise the fact that we still use the very words of prehistoric ancestors who were devotees of Thor, of Woden, and of Frea? Heathenism and magic survive in every line of our newspapers and every household word of our daily life. Nay, more; we can only express the highest conceptions of modern science in terms invented for us by barbaric predecessors—believers in fetishes, in shamans, in spirits, and in puerile talismans of the most silly description.

It is this extreme antiquity of language—this curious history wrapt up in every word, that makes our modern tongue a sort of living etymological cabinet to those who know how to wrest from each syllable its secret meaning and to read in each letter its past evolution. Words, in short, are not mere arbitrary symbols; they are appropriate sounds, applied at first to objects for some obviously sufficient and quite transparent reason—as transparent in the first instance as cuckoo or katydid, whip-poor-will or bobolink, the boom of cannon or the whirr of wheels, the thud of a falling avalanche or the purling murmur of a mountain stream. Gradually, in the course of time, they get curtailed or altered; their appropriateness fades, their echo fails; but still they keep up for us innumerable strange memories of the men who gave

them, and often enclose, in stratum over stratum, quaint reminiscences of age after age, each of which has twisted them to its own pattern. A word may thus be likened to some ancient cathedral, originally perhaps of pagan handicraft, and still preserving in its fabric a few worn fragments of Corinthian columns, then altered to Romanesque in its crypt and arches, afterwards Gothicised in its portals and windows, or renovated and defaced by Renaissance architects, and finally modernised in the churchwarden style by eighteenth-century muddlers. But traces of all this its chequered history generally survive on its very face till its latest moment.

Now, to quote the immortal language of Mrs. Cluppins to the Judge, 'I will not deceive you.' My object in writing this present contribution to the philosophy of language is not a wholly disinterested one. Let me take you into my confidence. I happen to abide in a cottage which bears the modest name of 'The Croft.' Ever since I called it so, however, life has been rendered a burden to me by people who ask me, the moment they come in, 'Oh, Mr. So-and-so, please what does a croft mean, and why is this house called one?' Well, I'm tired of unburdening my mind upon this philological question to the obvious boredom of the young ladies who ask it—for you may perhaps have observed that whenever a young lady broaches an abstract inquiry the last thing in the world she really expects is that you should try to answer it. So now I propose to put my views upon crofts in general on paper once for all, so that when young ladies in future propound their philological doubts to me I may be able to hand them a copy of this magazine, pop them comfortably down in the nearest window-seat, and say to them promptly, 'There you are! That article contains everything that is known to science about crofts and tofts and all their family. Sit down and read; and as soon as you have finished it, it will give me the greatest pleasure in life to examine you on the subject.' I flatter myself that vigorous course of action ought to stifle inquiry about crofts in future.

The longest way round is well known to students of the wisdom of our ancestors to be the shortest way home; therefore I propose to attack the subject of crofts and tofts by a short preliminary investigation of the nature of thorpes, which at first sight apparently irrelevant inquiry will finally cast light, I hope, upon our more immediate subject.

Forty years ago, I fancy, even well-educated people might easily have been ignorant of the very meaning of the word 'thorpe.'

As a personal name, indeed, it survived in common use, and as an element in such place-names as Fenthorpe or Mablethorpe it was abundant in many parts of Eastern England, but as a significant factor in the spoken or written language it had become practically obsolete. And so it might have remained, I believe, to the present day but for a Lincolnshire Dane, one Alfred Tennyson by name, who, born in a district where almost every village name ended in thorpe, must have been familiar with the word and its local signification from childhood upward. He reintroduced the half-forgotten term into literary English in his idyll of 'The Brook,' where everybody now remembers it in the almost classical quotation :—

By thirty hills I hurry down,
Or slip between the ridges :
By twenty thorps, a little town,
And half a hundred bridges.

Not long after, the word made its second appearance in modern literature among the ringing lines of Browning's 'Grammarians' Funeral,' where, oddly enough, it is immediately associated with its congener, 'croft,' in the well-known exordium :—

Let us begin and carry up this corpse,
Singing together.
Leave we the common crofts, the vulgar thorpes,
Each in its tether.

Thus sponsored by the two greatest poets of the age, the word 'thorpe' may fairly claim to have entered into its own again after a long eclipse of half a dozen centuries.

But whence did it come originally? Well, its remoter origin, like that of most other words, is lost in the mist of ages. All we can say with certainty is that it is a good old Teutonic term, common to all the branches of the Teutonic tongue, and surviving to this day in its true form in English, while in modern High German, that thick guttural corruption of the undivided mother-tongue, it is perverted into *dorf*, just as 'three' is perverted into *drei*, and 'that' into *das*. Indeed, in High German every original *th* has become a thickened *d*, while every original *p* has become a harsh *f*. This is one of the changes which constitute that mysterious entity known as Grimm's Law; it merely represents in scientific form the same tendency to thickening in the German vocal organs, so familiar to us all in Mr. Du Maurier's amusing parodies, which makes Germans nowadays say *touchours* for

toujours and *brovessor* for *professor*. It is just the German way of mumbling your consonants.

When the English pirates first swarmed over from the Continent to the land we now call England, in the mythical 'three keels' with Hengest and Horsa, they brought this common Teutonic word 'thorpe' along with them. It was 'thorpe,' not 'dorf,' in the old English fatherland. But they didn't use it much; for though they knew it, it wasn't the usual English word for a house or village; *ham* and *tun*, the origins of our modern 'home' and 'town,' were much more common in primæval England. Hence, in the purely English part of Britain, place-names like Buckingham, Birmingham, Nottingham, or like Kensington, Islington, Wellington, are much more frequent than place-names in thorpe, which last only occur at considerable distances. But when the Northern pirates from Denmark began to settle in our Eastern counties, under good King Alfred, they brought the word 'thorpe' with them as a common element of their spoken language; and in consequence, thorpes abound all over the district largely occupied by Guthrum and his Danes, more especially in Norfolk, Suffolk, and Lincolnshire. Sometimes the word occurs alone as a place-name, as at Thorpe, near Aldeburgh; sometimes it turns up in conjunction with another name, as at Thorpe-on-the-Wold, and Thorpe-in-the-Fallows; but most often it exists as a suffix alone, as in Theddlethorpe, Skellingthorpe, Kettlethorpe, and Laythorpe. Sir Isaac Newton was born at Woolthorpe, that is to say, Ulf's thorpe. Fridaythorpe was sacred to the goddess Frea. If some of these names have an awkward sound to modern ears, we must charitably remember that this was not the case in ancient times, when the Danish hero Ketel, or Ketyl, bearing a most aristocratic Scandinavian name, fixed his seat at Kettlethorpe, or when the great clan of the Scyllings, a most famous family, beloved of Mr. William Morris, placed the Raven banner of their kin at Skellingthorpe. But sometimes, I must admit, as at Hogthorpe, Bacons-thorpe, and Lobthorpe, even the most devoted apologist can but allow with a blush that the name from its very inception could never have been euphonious.

Mr. Streatfeild, the learned historian of the Danes in Lincolnshire, has further pointed out that the word 'thorpe' is rarely used of an isolated farm, but almost invariably denotes a collection of houses, especially those of the poorer classes—in one word, a village. Its companion word, *by*, on the other hand, as in Derby

and Scrivelsby, is often applied to the residence of a single great family. There are, therefore, more *thorpes* than *bys* in the rich pastures of the sea-marsh and the Trent Valley where the Danes settled thickly, but more *bys* than *thorpes* among the bleak upland hills, where the means of supporting life were at first less abundant. Mr. Cole similarly notices in Yorkshire that *thorpes* cluster thickest in the Vale of York and Holderness, but thin out on the wolds, and disappear altogether on the wilder and half-Celtic moorlands.

Territorial families who lived at a *thorpe* often bore its name, as is always the case in early times with landed houses. Thus Adam de Thorpe, Simon de Throp, or Ralph de Trop may all be mentioned, Mr. Bardsley tells us, in the self-same register; while familiar modern names derived from similar sources are Althorpe, Calthrop, Westropp, Conythrop, Hartrop, and Gawthorpe. Thorpe itself figures often in the uncompounded form as a surname, while Thrupp is only a slight dialectal corruption of the same original syllable.

Names of this type are particularly common in parts of New England, where, through a curious incident, they pass as almost a patent of nobility. To have 'come over in the Mayflower' is, of course, the Massachusetts equivalent for coming over, like the Slys, 'with Richard Conqueror.' Now the Mayflower refugees, as all the world knows, were for the most part Lincolnshire men or East Anglians; they called their capital Boston after the Lincolnshire port which was once Botulfston; and they mostly bore such surnames themselves as Winthrop, Haythrop, Lothrop, and Lathrop. Hence these Danish patronymics are very aristocratic to-day in Salem or Concord; they mark their possessor as a person of antique distinction in the Puritan commonwealth. 'My people came over in the Mayflower,' said an unknown New Yorker to a Plymouth Winthrop. 'Indeed!' was the crushing answer, 'I didn't know the Mayflower took steerage passengers.'

Nor do the derivatives of 'thorpe' stop even here. They have pervaded science; for Linnæus gave the pretty little Cornish moneywort the name of *Sibthorpia*, in compliment to a certain Dr. Sibthorp, who was professor of botany at Oxford; and as *Sibthorpia Europæa* it is now accordingly known from the Azores to Turkey, which are its extreme limits. I don't know whether this Dr. Sibthorp belonged to the same family as the famous Colonel Sibthorp, that stout old Conservative who so long opposed the introduction of railways, and who even after the iron horse became a

fait accompli preserved his dignity by descending from the train a few miles out of town and driving into London decorously in his own carriage, 'after the manner of his forefathers.'

Thus, at the present time, though we note it not, we are positively surrounded by thorpes of various kinds, from Copmans-thorpe, near York, 'the chapman's village,' to Yawthorpe and Grainthorpe in the Lincolnshire district. People named Thorpe abound in the London Directory; and compounds of Thorpe overrun all America from the Hub to Frisco. We are doubly thorped in place and person. Yet from the day when Chaucer wrote in the *Clerkes Tale*—

There stod a thorpe of sight delitable,

to the day when Tennyson and Browning restored the neglected word to the literary language, I doubt if it had ever once been written as a substantive by itself in any English poem or treatise.

The fortunes of 'toft' have been very similar. The word means originally a homestead or enclosure; it is a Teutonic root, but it was almost unknown in England before the Danish conquest, and, as Canon Isaac Taylor has acutely pointed out, it forms one of the best test-words of Danish occupation. It is exclusively Danish, indeed, as opposed to Norwegian: tofts being common in Danicised East Anglia, but almost unknown in Norwegian Cumberland. Lowestoft is perhaps the best-known instance of the names compounded with this half-forgotten word; but in Lincolnshire they abound, as at Huttoft, Fishtoft, Brothertoft, and Wigtoft. Some dozens of them are scattered over the interior of the county. The Danes who settled in Normandy spoke the self-same dialect as their brother-pirates in East Anglia, and took the word 'toft' with them to their French home. There, however, it was soon Gallicised into the softer form of *tôt*. Thus Ivo's toft became Yvetot, the famous little town whose mock-king is familiar to us all through Béranger's satirical *chanson* of 'Le Roi d'Yvetot.' In like manner, Blumtoft or Bloomtoft got corrupted into Plumetot; while its companion Littletoft now appears in Gaulish garb as Lilletot. Routot means red toft; Criquetot, crooked toft; Berquetot, birk toft or birch toft; Hautot, high toft; and Langetot, lang toft or long toft. For all these instances I am indebted to Canon Taylor's critical eye. Over a hundred others may still be collected in Normandy.

Only in one phrase, however, did the word 'toft' survive as such

in spoken or written English ; and that was in the rhyming legal locution, toft and croft, defined by Dr. Murray, in the great English dictionary, as 'a messuage with land attached.' This particular phrase 'toft and croft' belongs to the common legal class of rhyming or alliterative phrases, well-known instances of which are scot and lot, sac and soc, wear and tear, earl and churl, kith and kin, and so forth. A toft, then, in this case, is the house or tenement ; a croft is the surrounding plot of land or homestead in which it is situated.

The origin of 'croft' itself, even more than of its sister words, is 'wrop in mystery.' It is a very old English term, appearing in the charters or title-deeds of estates as long ago as the reign of Edgar, where the phrase 'at the croft's head' is quoted by Dr. Murray ; but it remained long unrecognised in the literary language. The old English form, like the modern one, is 'croft,' meaning an enclosed field ; in Lowland Scotch it appears generally in the form 'craft,' which is still employed in many derivatives ; but the only other Teutonic equivalent in the sister languages is the Dutch word 'kroft,' which means 'a piece of high and dry land,' 'a field on the downs,' 'a rocky headland.' In the North of England, according to Ray, the word 'croft' implies neighbourhood to a house ; but in the south it is applied to any small enclosure, near a building or otherwise.

Dr. Murray's English Dictionary gives several uses of croft in early times, though not for the most part in what can fairly be called literature. 'As he stood in his croft,' says a legal writer of the thirteenth century, whose spelling and grammar I mercifully modernise ; while Piers Plowman writes, 'Birds come into my croft and crop my wheat.' Early in the sixteenth century, Fitzherbert defines a curtylage (whatever that may be) as 'a lytell croft or court to put in catell for a tyme.' In the seventeenth century the phrase occurs, 'All ould tenants shall have a croft and a medow,' which sounds as if it came out of a Crofter Commission Report. But it was Milton who first ennobled the plebeian word by admitting it frankly into immortal poetry. The spirit in 'Comus' says to the Elder Brother :—

This have I learned

Tending my flocks hard by i' th' hilly crofts
That brow this bottom glade.

And his use of the word distinctly suggests the idea that to Milton at least a croft still carried with it something of its Dutch

suggestion of height or rockiness. This shade of meaning is probably present to-day in the minds of all those who speak of 'Highland crofts,' in which phrase, I fancy, there lurks even now some suspicion of an idea that the soil of a croft is naturally unfruitful, rocky, or heather-clad.

That is not the sense, however, which the word often bears in later English literature. Wordsworth writes:—

A little croft we owned—a plot of corn;

where cultivation is clearly implied in the expression; and Scott, in the 'Heart of Midlothian,' makes a wife 'occupy her husband's cottage and cultivate a croft of land adjacent.' As for Tennyson, his voice is obscure when he says:—

Thro' crofts and pastures wet with dew,
A living flash of light he flew;

but that more prosaic authority, the 'Glasgow Herald,' remarks outright, with no uncertain accent, 'The croft is now generally the best land in the farm, and every farm almost has its croft.' On the other hand, Dr. Murray, from whom I borrow much of this secondhand erudition, quotes 'The West Cornwall Glossary' for the opposite definition: 'Croft, an enclosed common not yet cultivated.' On the whole, seeing how much the doctors disagree, it would seem that the primitive sense of enclosure is still the only fixed and constant one, and that the other elements of meaning fluctuate as yet in use from person to person and from county to county, for in Dumfriesshire we read about 'a few acres of what is called croft-land, which is never out of crop;' while in another place we hear of 'waste land, consisting of marsh, croft, and sandy soils.' The contradictions are obvious. Here is a very pretty case for a lawyer to fight over.

For myself, I take my stand upon the Miltonic ground that my own particular croft is distinctly hilly, and that it 'brows a bottom glade' among the wildest in England.

In modern times, and for parliamentary purposes, a croft means especially a small holding worked by a peasant tenant, and most often a tenant who fishes for his livelihood. Indeed it has been wittily said that the Orkney man is a farmer who owns a boat, while the Shetlander is a fisherman who owns a farm. The man who cultivates a croft, again, is a crofter; and hence have arisen endless words and ideas in our latter-day language—the crofter question, crofting, crofterdom, and so forth. 'To croft

linen' is to expose it on the ground in the sun for bleaching, and a crofter is still the technical designation of the person who bleaches it. Of late years the crofter, like the poor, we have always with us.

As a proper name the best-known croft to most modern Englishmen is probably the pretty little suburb called the Croft at Hastings. There is, or was once, a Mavis Croft at Gainsborough. Ashcroft and Moorcroft occur to this day as village names. A suburb of Salisbury is known as the Green Croft. Tranby Croft has made its mark on our social history. But the suffix is far less frequent in place-names than either thorpe or toft. From its very nature, indeed, it belongs for the most part only to the isolated upland farms of cotter tenants; and such lonely shielings are very little likely to form the nucleus for a town or village. There is an isolated field near Lyme Regis, however, known as Lanchycraft, which has always moved my most mysterious feelings. The form of the name is northern, and tradition reports that a skeleton in armour—perhaps a Danish pirate—lies buried in the meadow. Snowdrops grow wild there, and nowhere else in the neighbourhood. Finally, the field, though remote from the town, conferred on its possessor a vote for the borough.

Among our modern surnames, Toft and Croft are but fairly well represented. Burghman or Burman is a good old English name, recorded in the 'Hundred Rolls;' and one such Burman, no doubt, gave his patronymic to some upland toft, which was thenceforth known among his neighbours as Burmantoft. From that village, in turn, sprang a family of Burmantofts, and from them, once more, comes the name of the fantastic Burmantoft pottery (which reminds me incidentally that when dealing with thorpes I forgot Linthorpe). I have met once with a person named Eastoft, and have seen Bratoft over a shop door in America, but, on the whole, tofts cannot compare with thorpes as producers of patronymics. Crofts are far commoner in surnames, however. Meadowcroft is perhaps the most poetical form; but Ryecroft and Ashcroft also occur, the last being borne at present as a christian-name by a distinguished critic. The Allcrofts are a mighty firm of glovers. The name of Bancroft is not unknown to theatre-goers; and Canon Bardsley explains it as meaning really bean-croft. Berecroft in like manner is equivalent to barleycroft. An Englishman named Moorcroft was the first European to explore

Tibet. North Country forms tend rather towards the North Country variant *craft*. A gentleman of the name of *Calcraft*, it may be remembered, long held a lucrative position of trust and responsibility under her Majesty's Government; in point of fact, he was the common hangman. *Hay* in old English signifies a hedge, and *Haycraft* is therefore just the hedged croft or fenced enclosure. What *Cracraft* means I cannot conjecture. *Croft* and *Craft* are themselves surnames, like *Thorpe*, though of somewhat less frequent occurrence; the plural form *Crofts* is not wholly unknown; and I have met with *Croftman*. *Crofter*, as a surname, on the other hand, has never happened to pass my way; but as the word itself is of tolerably old standing, even in print, some of my readers may have been more fortunate in scraping acquaintance with it.

One curious little point in the history of language which *croft* and *toft* and *thorpe* alike illustrate is the influence of fashion in deciding the fate of various elements in a literature. Words rise once into use, decay, become obsolete, and are revived again by caprice—just like hooped petticoats or leg-of-mutton sleeves—at the will of the classes who make the language. Sometimes they surge up from below at the bidding of the mob, as is the case just now with all the odious music-hall words at present being forced upon us; sometimes they die out for a time, and are called back to life, on account of their inherent beauty or their literary associations, by poet or essayist. *Thorpe* was almost dead between the day when Chaucer wrote

The cock, that horloge is of *thorpës litë*,

and the day when Tennyson and Browning revived it at one blast in two immortal lyrics. *Croft* was almost dead from the time when some anonymous dramatist in the '*Towneley Mysteries*' made Satan call to mankind,

Come to my *crofte* alle ye,

to the time when Milton introduced it once more into the full blaze of literary light in '*Comus*.' Even then it remained a mere poetical and literary word till the *crofter* agitation in the Western Islands and Highlands of Scotland made it suddenly blossom out into the official dignity of Blue-books and Parliamentary Enquiries. Nowadays, there is a *Crofter Society* and a *Crofter League*, a vast *Crofter literature*, and a burning *Crofter question*. As for '*toft*,' poor neglected word, it still waits its turn. I can't

recollect that any great poet has extended to it the hospitality of his sonorous lines; and, indeed, its unlucky likeness to the commonest childish mispronunciation of *soft* weights it somewhat heavily at the very outset as a possible subject for the fastidious muse. But the whirligig of time brings its revenges unexpectedly, and perhaps in some twenty years more we shall all be prepared to find

By lonely moorland toft or heathery wold

quite as poetical and pretty as we find to-day the clustering thorpes and upland crofts of contemporary versification.

The eighteenth century was nothing if not classical. It went off at a tangent after a Latinised vocabulary and a pedantic style. It cared for no charmers save Euphemia and Chloe; it loved to gaze entranced on Cynthia's pallid ray; it tuned its Aeolian lyre or its oaten reed to false Virgilian echoes and secondhand Theocritean lays. From Helicon's harmonious springs it rolled its monotonous music through verdant vales and Ceres' golden reign. It lapped its soul in Lydian measures, till all the world was fairly sick of them. Our own age, grown tired of nymphs and fauns and all the other eighteenth-century borrowed stock-in-trade, has returned with delight from Parnassus and Mæander to the forgotten wealth of our own language. It has revived many words of our Teutonic mother-tongue, half obsolete till now since the Middle Ages. It has thus brought back literature many steps nearer to the speech of our ancestors, and has enormously enriched our own spoken vocabulary from the storehouse of Chaucer and his predecessors. Among the beautiful words which this happy revolution has well reinstated in our modern tongue are 'thorpe' and 'croft;' another generation will very probably add 'toft' and 'thwaite' as well to the ever-growing number.

BARNABAS RABBITS' RAIN-CLOUD.

I.

'WELL,' said Colonel O'Rorke as he strolled forth upon his parched lawn, with his hands in his pockets and his Panama hat cunningly bent 'twixt his face and the unclouded sun, 'though this is the seventy-fifth day since we've had a drop of rain down here, reckon we can't grumble, Martha, if it keeps fine this afternoon.'

'My goodness, John!' exclaimed Mrs. O'Rorke, 'it gives me the creeps to think of rain to-day.'

'You can reserve your creeps, my dear, for a time more suitable. I'm going to have my moths out. If that ain't a sign of fine weather where 'll you find it?'

'Your moths, John? Oh, don't now. If you remember, at our last party you lost three of them—the most valuable ones too, weren't they?'

'They were,' said the Colonel grimly. 'But I know now who pinched them. That party's gone to another township. He had no choice, after what I hinted to him. We are as honest a lot in Scorchers nowadays as you'll find anywhere in Texas.'

'It is such a queer idea too, John. Moths at a garden party!'

'Queer, begad! There's nothing queer in it that I can see. I know a lady of my own witty nation who on the like occasion paid fellows to set a hare across the lawn. It's diversion, my dear. Folks' spirits ain't always at top pitch at these sort of merry-makings. They want a spark in their energies. Well, my moths 'll do for the hare. Most people in the States know about Colonel O'Rorke's unrivalled collection of the world's moths. They'll be set round on trays, and the three darkies 'll keep their eyes on 'em.'

Mrs. O'Rorke sighed resignedly. Her husband's whim seemed to her a mild reflection upon her entertaining abilities.

The moths were accordingly brought forth—tray after tray. There were five cabinets of them. The wood alone of the cabinets and trays would have sufficed for a small ring fence. Colonel O'Rorke superintended their arrangement. At first sight you would have said that the lawn was designed for an open-air bazaar.

Yet plenty of moving room remained, and when the *élite* of Scorchers came up, mostly in volatile buggies drawn by long-tailed horses, loud and sincere were the cries of gladness evoked by their host's hospitable consideration of them.

II.

Barnabas Rabbits resided about half a mile from Colonel O'Rorke. He was an industrious man, with a scientific itch and a sister. His sister Betsy was by way of being a *belle*, though she was getting on for thirty. Of course she was among the invited to Colonel O'Rorke's festivity. For the matter of that, so was Barnabas. But no one supposed that Barnabas would attend. He was hardly ever seen in anything but his shirt-sleeves, and Colonel O'Rorke was a person who exacted tall hats from those who honoured him with their society when he and Mrs. O'Rorke issued cards.

Sister Betsy began her toilet at an early hour. Brother Barnabas was otherwise engaged.

In fact, Barnabas Rabbits was more than engaged: he was engrossed. He had been in correspondence with a dealer in showers who lived at Cincinnati, and the correspondence had at last eventuated in business. Mr. Rabbits had, with divers misgivings and also keen hopes, transmitted twenty dollars to the shower merchant, and had that morning received in return a snug little packet warranted to give him twenty tons of good wholesome rain whenever he chose.

Having read and re-read the instructions that accompanied the packet, Mr. Rabbits had inspected his garden and calculated the profit that would accrue to it when he let loose the shower. Everything looked disgustingly brown and yellow and powdery, and even the hardiest and least bibulous of his flowers hung their heads. Then, from his own garden, he had slouched on to his neighbours' gardens, some with fields of ill-conditioned wheat adjacent. He had chuckled repeatedly also as he thought of the contrast about four-and-twenty hours would produce between his property and, for example, Mike Annesley's, which was conterminous with his. He hated Mike Annesley with a great hatred.

Barnabas's appetite had given way before the spiritual excitement of his packet of rain. Sister Betsy had remarked it. She would have taken more sympathetic notice of it had she not her-

self been preoccupied about gowns. The Scorchers ladies were wont to be monumental in colours. Sister Betsy did not mean to be obscure if she (that is, her wardrobe) could help it.

Sister Betsy appeared at length in a gown of cabbage green. She wore also a very flushed face. The strain of choosing the cabbage-green frock had been immense. She reckoned, however, that she would have her reward in unlimited admiration. The ostrich-feather in her hat, though snow-white, went well with her frock: Barnabas, on being asked, said so.

'And how, Barny, shall you fill up your gaps?' sister Betsy asked, warmed to the core by her brother's praise.

'Me! Oh, I'm thinking of a thing. Country looks kind o' yaller, don't it?'

'That ain't new news,' said sister Betsy, derisively, as she tried to cool her red face, for the sake of the cabbage-coloured gown.

'Guess not. You'll see, though.'

'What, in goodness, Barny, am I to see? A body knows as the wells have nigh run dry and we're in for a famine this fall. You ain't going to waste the pumps on the flowers?'

'Not much, Betsy,' replied Barnabas, with an irritating grin of angelic wisdom on his countenance. 'You'll see, though. And now you'd better be off and enj'y yerself!'

Sister Betsy went off in a huff. Her brother did not often indulge in enigmas, and she resented the inexplicable smile on his face.

III.

The company at the O'Rorkes' garden party numbered nearly fifty, and there were many worse frocks and discordances than sister Betsy's cabbage-green gown and white ostrich-feather.

Jake Thompson's wife and three girls from the sawmill turned out in grass-green trimmed with blue, the old lady sporting a scarlet fichu into the bargain, spite of her children's wails that fichus were long out of fashion. Miss Cornelia Jewitt, the school-marm, came in pale blue. She wore her hair in extensive curls, and a white straw hat with strings sat perkily on her head. Mrs. Rand, the leading land-agent's wife, astonished even herself in her yellow silk—improved by a heliotrope parasol. There was also a very stout lady from Kentucky (a guest of the doctor's), who was conspicuous in a heliotrope bodice and a white corset skirt.

These details, however, give but an imperfect idea of the magnificence of the scene. The materials of the various costumes were mostly silk or satin. The leading *modiste* of Galveston had been hard at work for three weeks upon them and the bills that were to be their corollary.

The parallel of a tulip-bed has often been applied to a garden party. The same comparison may be used here if hollyhocks and sunflowers may be interspersed among the tulips, and the flowers be set in uneasy movement to and fro about a dried-up lawn with not an atom of shade from a sun that seemed to burn to the bone.

The phrase 'How nice you look, dear!' went backwards and forwards among the ladies. Those who could not, either from physical or conscientious scruples, keep it up to the surfeit point found solace in ices, half-frozen drinks, and moths. The enthusiasm excited by the moths was great, as it was bound to be. And the three darkies on guard, in mauve livery trimmed with green, paid particular heed to the elbow action of the guests who excelled at eulogistic interjections.

So an hour passed. Then, suddenly, Colonel O'Rorke, who was being very civil to Miss Amelia Thompson, stared at the horizon, frowned, and cried aloud—

'What in thunder's that?'

IV.

'It's noiseless,' said Barnabas Rabbits, reading the instructions for the fifth time ere casting the little cube of composition upon the ground, 'and I wouldn't wish it not to be.'

He hesitated, looked at the blinding purple sky, at his little grey bungalow with the green shutters, and the three pairs of sister Betsy's stockings which hung so touchingly on a wire between two of the verandah posts, and then at his thirsty garden and dejected flowers.

'Mighty queer!' he murmured as he rubbed his rough chin with one hand while again contemplating his twenty tons of condensed rain. 'How the Moses can all that liquid come without never a sound? This yere bit o' mess cost ten cents by the mail; cheap carriage I call that for twenty tons o' stuff!'

Then he read the instructions for the sixth time. According to the maker, he was to stand about a hundred feet from the area

he wished to water, and was to hurl the cube of composition in that direction. There was then to be a smoke which should slowly pack, rise, and rush strongly towards its destined goal. The deluge would not fail to ensue.

'Wal!' said Barnabas at length, 'here goes!'

He tossed the concentrated rain-cloud upon the hard soil and folded his arms.

'Bless my cats!' he exclaimed slowly as before his astonished eyes a dense mass of vapour arose. Then he ran boldly through the middle of it, towards the house, to watch how it did its watering.

Now, according to the inventor of this particular kind of rain-cloud, that is where Barnabas erred. He ought not to have interfered with its works by scampering across its half-formed organisation. But he did not know what he had done until afterwards.

In a very short time the cloud hustled itself into something like shape, and then sped off laterally, like a balloon before a strong current. It took no more notice of Barnabas Rabbits' thirsty flowers than if they were not. In a moment or two it had passed them by.

'Now, darn it!' cried Barnabas, in a rage, 'if the cussed thing harn't scooted off my estate!'

He watched it open-mouthed—a dark oblong mass with ragged edges—as it hurried westwards.

'I'll just swear, I will, if it busts itself over Mike Annesley's garden—twenty ton o' nice rain like that!'

The next instant he saw that it had broken. Standing where he did, he could hear its music—like that of a million large-sized garden water-cans set in motion at the same time. He felt the air freshen while he watched it wonderingly. In one minute, however, all was over. Nothing remained of it. The brazen sky seemed more brazen than ever.

V.

Much perturbed, Barnabas ran off in his shirt-sleeves to see who had profited by his purchase. He heard loud cries from O'Rorke's house long before he got near it. Divers citizens, like himself, were speeding in the same direction, spawning ejaculations while they ran.

Then he saw a dull mass of colour worry out of the Colonel's porch. From the midst of it his fraternal eyes distinguished his sister Betsy, with her cabbage-green frock clinging to her body as if she had a bath in it. The stout lady in the heliotrope uppers and the white corset skirt fought through the crowd and bombarded *her* way down the street—a sight to divert Momus himself! As she ran she made a brook. There were a variety of other affecting scenes of a similar kind. And the language of these outraged ladies as they puddled their dismal homeward track was something unique in Scorchers' experience.

When they had all gone, Colonel O'Rorke stood, dripping, at his garden gate, and swore loud and long.

In the meantime, however, Barnabas Rabbits had made up his mind.

'What in goodness has happened?' he screamed as he contemplated his damp sister. 'Has it been raining all that?'

'It was just a shower,' hiccoughed the poor lady, in utter grief for her cabbage-green frock, which now proved that its colour was not fast; 'it didn't rain anywhere else. It just covered us up and wetted us, as you see.'

'Wal, I never did!' exclaimed brother Barnabas. 'Twenty ton o' rain among fifty folks *is* pretty smart shares.'

'What?' asked sister Betsy impatiently.

'Oh, nothing, my dear. You just hurry on and get quit of that gown. I'm glad, any way, it didn't do Mike Annesley a turn,' said Barnabas to himself when his sister had renewed her heavy exertions homewards.

It did not take long for Colonel O'Rorke to surmise that some one had been larking around with rain-manufactures. But he could not, try how he might, discover whom it behoved him to sue for the 20,000 dollars at which he rated his collection of moths, now utterly spoilt, and afterwards fight in order to vindicate himself with his guests.

Manifestly, Barnabas Rabbits was not in a position to make a fuss with the dealer in showers; and he had to be satisfied with the merchant's explanation about the miscarriage of the particular shower 'with which,' as he phrased it, 'discontent had been expressed.'

THE LAST GOVERNOR OF THE BASTILLE.

THERE has recently come into the hands of the present writer a little volume, the contents of which throw a curious light upon the internal economy of the Bastille during the time that Count de Launay filled the post of Governor. The title of the book, which was published in Dublin in 1783, runs as follows:

‘Memoirs of the Bastille, containing a full Explanation of the Mysterious Policy and Despotic Oppression of the French Government in the Interior Administration of that State Prison.

‘Translated from the French of the celebrated M. Linguet, who was imprisoned there from September, 1780, to May, 1782.’

It is stated in the translator’s preface that M. Linguet was, for ten years, one of the most distinguished of the Councillors of the Parliament of Paris, and enjoyed a high reputation as an orator. But, unluckily for him, he undertook the publication of a periodical entitled ‘*Annales Politiques, Civiles et Littéraires du 18^{ème} Siècle*,’ in which he ventured to expose the abuses that then prevailed in the administration of nearly every department of the Government.

The Count de Vergennes, one of the French ministers, was so exasperated by an attack made upon him in one of the numbers of the ‘*Annales*’ that he obtained from the king a *lettre de cachet*, by virtue of which M. Linguet was arrested and sent to the Bastille.

In the course of the ‘*Mémoires*’ this gentleman describes how prisoners who were not of high rank were, in his time, treated. He says:—‘Most of the cells are in the towers, the walls of which are at least twelve, and at the base thirty to forty, feet thick. Each cell has a small vent-hole in the wall, crossed by three bars of iron, so that a passage is left to the sight of scarcely two inches square. Several of the cells—and mine was one of these—are situated upon the moat into which the common sewer of the Rue St. Antoine empties itself, so that in summer, after a few days of hot weather, there exhales from the stagnant water a most infectious, pestilential vapour, and when it has once penetrated through the vent-holes into the cells, it is a considerable time before it is got rid of.’

De Launay, it is stated, contracted with the Government to supply the furniture of the prisoners’ rooms at a fixed price, this

being one of the many perquisites attached to his office. The furniture of M. Linguet's cell consisted of two mattresses, half eaten by moths, a matted arm-chair, the seat of which was only kept together by pack-thread, a rickety old table, a water-pitcher, two pots of Dutch-ware, one of which served to drink out of, and a flagstone to hold the wood fire. No dog-irons, tongs, shovel, nor poker was provided, these utensils being regarded by the Governor as superfluous luxuries. The prisoners, too, were prohibited to buy these conveniences for themselves, since, had this been the case, it would have afforded palpable evidence to the Government that De Launay had neglected to furnish the rooms in a proper manner.

In the winter, too, the prisoners frequently suffered from the cold, owing to the insufficient supply of firing. 'Formerly,' says M. Linguet, 'a proper quantity was allowed, and, without doubt, the instructions given on this point still remain the same. But the present Governor has limited the allowance to each prisoner to six billets of wood a day, *large or small*. This economical purveyor of firing is careful to pick out in the timber merchants' yard the smallest logs he can find. Not only does he do this, but he selects those which are worm-eaten and rotten, they being, of course, the cheapest. By this course being pursued, although the purchaser is allowed a handsome commission on the transaction, the total cost of the firing to the Government is less than it was formerly.'

De Launay was allowed a fixed sum for the subsistence of each of the prisoners, according to his social position, the amount ranging from five livres *per diem* for a tradesman or other member of the *bourgeoisie*, to twenty-five livres for a marshal of France. This allowance was by no means an inadequate one, and had the money been expended in conformity with the intentions of the Government, the inmates of the Bastille would have had, in this respect, no reasonable cause for complaint. But the privilege accorded to De Launay of purchasing provisions for the prisoners was, M. Linguet declares, abused to such an extent 'that not only was the food provided inferior in quality, but it was, in most instances, so insufficient in quantity that there were prisoners who, at dinner, were not allowed above four ounces of meat.' Consequently the savings thus effected alone amounted to no inconsiderable sum.

Again, De Launay was authorised, as had been the case with

his predecessors in office, to buy for the use of the inmates of the Bastille one hundred tuns of wine annually, without having to pay the *octroi* on them. The object of this exemption from the city dues was, of course, to furnish the prisoners with good wine at cost price. 'But the present Governor,' says M. Linguet, 'sells this concession to a tavern-keeper in Paris of the name of Joli, for six thousand two hundred and fifty livres, and takes in exchange the worst kind of wines for the consumption of the prisoners.'

De Launay, not content with the augmentation to his income derived from the above sources, went to the extent of letting out the grounds attached to the prison to a gardener; and in order to make the better bargain, those of the prisoners who had formerly enjoyed the privilege of taking exercise in the garden were rigorously excluded from it. In fact, it would appear from M. Linguet's statements that De Launay proved himself more ingenious in devising expedients for increasing the emoluments to be derived from his post than had been any of his predecessors.

The way, too, in which he obtained the post was characteristic of the social and political abuses which prevailed in France at that period, many of the most important appointments under Government being sold to the highest bidder, quite irrespective of the qualifications of the candidates for filling them properly. Indeed, so general was the usage that no more odium attached to these transactions than it does, at the present day in this country, to the purchase of the next presentation to a church living.

Under these circumstances De Launay—he being desirous of obtaining the governorship of the Bastille—entered into negotiations with the Count de Jumilhac, who then held the appointment, with a view of securing the reversion of the post when the Count, who was in bad health, should resign it. The conditions of the compact were that De Launay should pay the sum of three hundred thousand livres, and that his daughter, who would have a handsome dowry, should become the wife of the Count's eldest son.

This arrangement was carried out through the interest with the Ministry of the Prince di Conti, in whose service was a younger brother of De Launay's, notwithstanding the fact that there were other candidates for the appointment who, besides being prepared to pay the price demanded, could plead in their favour previous services to the State. 'This was not the circumstance,' says M. Linguet, 'with De Launay. He had never filled any civil

post, and his military career had been brief and undistinguished.' The influence of the Prince, however, was all-powerful, and De Launay was secured the reversion of the post he sought.

The almost invariable result of an official being obliged to pay a large sum for any important Government appointment was that, as soon as he was installed in the post, he sought to recoup himself for the outlay by practising the most outrageous form of extortion. This evil pervaded every department of the State, even the French judiciary, prior to the Revolution, being notoriously corrupt. More especially was this the case with the farmers of the revenue, who, at the same time, oppressed the people and defrauded the Government. In this connection an anecdote is related of Voltaire. He was spending a few days at the house of a friend. It was proposed one evening, by his host, that, to while away the time, each of the gentlemen present should tell a story of some celebrated robber. This was agreed to, and the exploits of Cartouche, Madrin and others were dwelt upon. Finally, it became Voltaire's turn. He rose, lighted a bedroom candle which stood on a side table, and then said, 'Gentlemen, there was once a *Fermier Général*.' With not a further word, he bowed gravely to the company and walked out of the room. He evidently thought to add anything to the fact that the individual referred to was a farmer of the revenue would be superfluous, as, necessarily, his exploits as a robber must have far surpassed those of any of the persons whose deeds had formed the topic of conversation.

The intense hatred with which the great mass of the nation regarded those individuals who had filled posts of any kind under Government found expression, during the Revolution, by the members of that class being hunted down and put to death, under circumstances, in many instances, of the most revolting brutality.

In conclusion it may be said that, while perusing M. Lingnet's narrative, the reflection naturally suggests itself how little could he have imagined, when he penned it in 1783, that, in the course of a few years, a terrible convulsion of society would take place in France, and one that should sweep away for ever the abuses of which he had been the victim—that the Bastille, that odious monument of the oppression under which the people had suffered for countless generations, would be razed to the ground, and that the last Governor of it was destined to meet a cruel death at the hands of an infuriated populace.

WITH EDGED TOOLS.

CHAPTER XL.

SIR JOHN'S LAST CARD.

'Tis better playing with a lion's whelp
Than with an old one dying.

As through an opera runs the rhythm of one dominant air, so through men's lives there rings a dominant note, soft in youth, strong in manhood, and soft again in old age. But it is always there, and whether soft in the gentler periods, or strong amidst the noise and clang of the perihelion, it dominates always and gives its tone to the whole life.

The dominant tone of Sir John Meredith's existence had been the high, clear note of battle. He had always found something or some one to fight from the very beginning, and now, in his old age, he was fighting still. His had never been the din and crash of warfare by sword and cannon, but the subtler, deeper combat of the pen. In his active days he had got through a vast amount of work—that unchronicled work of the Foreign Office which never comes, through the cheap newspapers, to the voracious maw of a chattering public. His name was better known on the banks of the Neva, the Seine, the Bosphorus, or the swift-rolling Iser than by the Thames; and grim Sir John was content to have it so.

His face had never been public property, the comic papers had never used his personality as a peg upon which to hang their ever-changing political principles. But he had always been 'there,' as he himself vaguely put it. That is to say, he had always been at the back—one of those invisible powers of the stage by whose command the scene is shifted, the lights are lowered for the tragedy, or the gay music plays on the buffoon. Sir John had no sympathy with a generation of men and women who would rather be laughed at and despised than unnoticed. He belonged to an age wherein it was held better to be a gentleman than the object of a cheap and evanescent notoriety—and he was at once the despair and the dread of newspaper interviewers, enterprising publishers, and tuft-hunters.

He was so little known out of his own select circle that the

porters in Euston Station asked each other in vain who the old swell waiting for the four o'clock 'up' from Liverpool could be. The four o'clock was, moreover, not the first express which Sir John had met that day. His stately carriage-and-pair had pushed its way into the crowd of smaller and humbler vehicular fry earlier in the afternoon, and on that occasion also the old gentleman had indulged in a grave promenade upon the platform.

He was walking up and down there now, with his hand in the small of his back, where of late he had been aware of a constant aching pain. He was very upright, however, and supremely unconscious of the curiosity aroused by his presence in the mind of the station 'canaille.' His lips were rather more troublesome than usual, and his keen eyes twinkled with a suppressed excitement.

In former days there had been no one equal to him in certain diplomatic crises where it was a question of browbeating suavely the uppish representative of some foreign State. No man could then rival him in the insolently aristocratic school of diplomacy which England has made her own. But in his most dangerous crisis he had never been restless, apprehensive, pessimistic, as he was at this moment. And after all it was a very simple matter that had brought him here. It was merely the question of meeting a man as if by accident, and then afterwards making that man do certain things required of him. Moreover, the man was only Guy Oscar—learned if you will in forest craft, but a mere child in the hands of so old a diplomatist as Sir John Meredith.

That which made Sir John so uneasy was the abiding knowledge that Jack's wedding-day would dawn in twelve hours. The margin was much too small, through, however, no fault of Sir John's. The West African steamer had been delayed—unaccountably—two days. A third day lost in the Atlantic would have overthrown Sir John Meredith's plan. He had often cut things fine before, but somehow now—not that he was getting old, oh no!—but somehow the suspense was too much for his nerves. He soon became irritated and distrustful. Besides the pain in his back wearied him and interfered with the clear sequence of his thoughts.

The owners of the West African steamer had telegraphed that the passengers had left for London in two separate trains. Guy Oscar was not in the first—there was no positive reason why he should be in the second. More depended upon his being in this second express than Sir John cared to contemplate.

The course of his peregrinations brought him into the vicinity of an inspector whose attitude betokened respect while his presence raised hope.

'Is there any reason to suppose that your train is coming?' he inquired of the official.

'Signalled now, my lord,' replied the inspector, touching his cap.

'And what does that mean?' uncompromisingly ignorant of technical parlance.

'It will be in in one minute, my lord.'

Sir John's hand was over his lips as he walked back to the carriage, casting as it were the commander's eye over the field.

'When the crowd is round the train you come and look for me,' he said to the footman, who touched his cockaded hat in silence.

At that moment the train lumbered in, the engine wearing that inanely self-important air affected by locomotives of the larger build. From all quarters an army of porters besieged the platform, and in a few seconds Sir John was in the centre of an agitated crowd. There was one other calm man on that platform—another man with no parcels, whom no one sought to embrace. His brown face and close-cropped head towered above a sea of agitated bonnets. Sir John, whose walk in life had been through crowds, elbowed his way forward and deliberately walked against Guy Osgard.

'D—n it!' he exclaimed, turning round. 'Ah!—Mr. Osgard—how d'ye do?'

'How are you?' replied Guy Osgard, really glad to see him.

'You are a good man for a crowd; I think I will follow in your wake,' said Sir John. 'A number of people—of the baser sort. Got my carriage here somewhere. Fool of a man looking for me in the wrong place, no doubt. Where are you going? May I offer you a lift? This way. Here, John, take Mr. Osgard's parcels.'

He could not have done it better in his keenest day. Guy Osgard was seated in the huge roomy carriage before he had realised what had happened to him.

'Your man will look after your traps, I suppose?' said Sir John, hospitably drawing the fur rug from the opposite seat.

'Yes,' replied Guy, 'although he is not my man. He is Jack's man Joseph.'

'Ah, of course; excellent servant, too. Jack told me he had left him with you.'

Sir John leant out of the window and asked the footman whether he knew his colleague Joseph, and upon receiving an answer in the affirmative he gave orders—acting as Guy's mouth-piece—that the luggage was to be conveyed to Russell Square. While these orders were being executed the two men sat waiting in the carriage, and Sir John lost no time.

'I am glad,' he said, 'to have this opportunity of thanking you for all your kindness to my son in this wild expedition of yours.'

'Yes,' replied Osgard, with a transparent reserve which rather puzzled Sir John.

'You must excuse me,' said the old gentleman, sitting rather stiffly, 'if I appear to take a somewhat limited interest in this great Simiacine discovery, of which there has been considerable talk in some circles. The limit to my interest is drawn by a lamentable ignorance. I am afraid the business details are rather unintelligible to me. My son has endeavoured, somewhat cursorily perhaps, to explain the matter to me, but I have never mastered the—er—commercial technicalities. However, I understand that you have made quite a mint of money, which is the chief consideration—nowadays.'

He drew the rug more closely round his knees and looked out of the window, deeply interested in a dispute between two cabmen.

'Yes—we have been very successful,' said Osgard. 'How is your son now? When I last saw him he was in a very bad way. Indeed I hardly expected to see him again.'

Sir John was still interested in the dispute, which was not yet settled.

'He is well, thank you. You know that he is going to be married.'

'He told me that he was engaged,' replied Osgard; 'but I did not know that anything definite was fixed.'

'The most definite thing of all is fixed—the date. It is to-morrow.'

'To-morrow?'

'Yes. You have not much time to prepare your wedding garments.'

'Oh,' replied Osgard with a laugh, 'I have not been bidden.'

'I expect the invitation is awaiting you at your house. No doubt my son will want you to be present—they would both like you to be there no doubt. But come with me now: we will call

and see Jack. I know where to find him. In fact, I have an appointment with him at a quarter to five.'

It may seem strange that Guy Oscar should not have asked the name of his friend's prospective bride, but Sir John was ready for that. He gave his companion no time. Whenever he opened his lips Sir John turned Oscar's thoughts aside.

What he had told him was strictly true. He had an appointment with Jack—an appointment of his own making.

'Yes,' he said in pursuance of his policy of choking questions, 'he is wonderfully well, as you will see for yourself.'

Oscar submitted silently to this high-handed arrangement. He had not known Sir John well. Indeed all his intercourse with him has been noted in these pages. He was rather surprised to find him so talkative and so very friendly. But Guy Oscar was not a very deep person. He was sublimely indifferent to the Longdrawn Motive. He presumed that Sir John made friends of his son's friends; and in his straightforward acceptance of facts he was perfectly well aware that by his timely rescue he had saved Jack Meredith from the hands of the tribes. The presumption was that Sir John knew of this, and it was only natural that he should be somewhat exceptionally gracious to the man who had saved his son's life.

It would seem that Sir John divined these thoughts, for he presently spoke of them.

'Owing to an unfortunate difference of opinion with my son we have not been very communicative lately,' he said with that deliberation which he knew how to assume when he desired to be heard without interruption. 'I am therefore almost entirely ignorant of your African affairs, but I imagine Jack owes more to your pluck and promptness than has yet transpired. I gathered as much from one or two conversations I had with Miss Gordon when she was in England. I am one of Miss Gordon's many admirers.'

'And I am another,' said Oscar frankly.

'Ah! Then you are happy enough to be the object of a reciprocal feeling which for myself I could scarcely expect. She spoke of you in no measured language. I gathered from her that if you had not acted with great promptitude the—er—happy event of to-morrow could not have taken place.'

The old man paused, and Guy Oscar, who looked somewhat distressed and distinctly uncomfortable, could find no graceful way of changing the conversation.

'In a word,' went on Sir John in a very severe tone, 'I owe you a great debt. You saved my boy's life.'

'Yes, but you see,' argued Oscar, finding his tongue at last, 'out there things like that don't count for so much.'

'Oh—don't they?' There was the suggestion of a smile beneath Sir John's grim eyebrows.

'No,' returned Oscar rather lamely, 'it is a sort of thing that happens every day out there.'

Sir John turned suddenly, and with the courtliness that was ever his he indulged in a rare exhibition of feeling. He laid his hand on Guy Oscar's stalwart knee.

'My dear Oscar,' he said, and when he chose he could render his voice very soft and affectionate, 'none of those arguments apply to me because I am not out there. I like you for trying to make little of your exploit. Such conduct is worthy of you—worthy of a gentleman, but you cannot disguise the fact that Jack owes his life to you and I owe you the same, which, between you and me, I may mention, is more valuable to me than my own. I want you to remember always that I am your debtor, and if—if circumstances should ever seem to indicate that the feeling I have for you is anything but friendly and kind, do me the honour of disbelieving those indications—you understand?'

'Yes,' replied Oscar untruthfully.

'Here we are at Lady Cantourne's,' continued Sir John, 'where, as it happens, I expect to meet Jack. Her ladyship is naturally interested in the affair of to-morrow, and has kindly undertaken to keep us up to date in our behaviour. You will come in with me?'

Oscar remembered afterwards that he was rather puzzled—that there was perhaps in his simple mind the faintest tinge of a suspicion. At the moment, however, there was no time to do anything but follow. The man had already rung the bell, and Lady Cantourne's butler was holding the door open. There was something in his attitude vaguely suggestive of expectation. He never took his eyes from Sir John Meredith's face as if on the alert for an unspoken order.

Guy Oscar followed his companion into the hall, and the very scent of the house—for each house speaks to more senses than one—made his heart leap in his broad breast. It seemed as if Millicent's presence was in the very air. This was more than he could have hoped. He had not intended to call this afternoon, although the visit was only to have been postponed for twenty-four hours.

Sir John Meredith's face was a marvel to see. It was quite steady. He was upright and alert, with all the intrepidity of his mind up in arms: There was a light in his eyes—a gleam of light from other days, not yet burnt out.

He laid aside his gold-headed cane and threw back his shoulders.

‘Is Mr. Meredith upstairs?’ he said to the butler.

‘Yes, sir.’

The man moved towards the stairs.

‘You need not come!’ said Sir John, holding up his hand.

The butler stood aside and Sir John led the way up to the drawing-room.

At the door he paused for a moment. Guy Oscar was at his heels. Then he opened the door rather slowly, and motioned gracefully with his left hand to Oscar to pass in before him.

Oscar stepped forward. When he had crossed the threshold Sir John closed the door sharply behind him and turned to go downstairs.

CHAPTER XLI.

A TROIS.

Men serve women kneeling; when they get on their feet they go away.

GUY OSCAR stood for a moment on the threshold. He heard the door closed behind him, and he took two steps farther forward.

Jack Meredith and Millicent were at the fireplace. There was a heap of disordered paper and string upon the table, and a few wedding presents standing in the midst of their packing.

Millicent's pretty face was quite white. She looked from Meredith to Oscar with a sudden horror in her eyes. For the first time in her life she was at a loss—quite taken aback.

‘Oh—h!’ she whispered, and that was all.

The silence that followed was tense as if something in the atmosphere was about to snap; and in the midst of it the wheels of Sir John's retreating carriage came to the ears of the three persons in the drawing-room.

It was only for a moment, but in that moment the two men saw clearly. It was as if the veil from the girl's mind had fallen—leaving her thoughts confessed, bare before them. In the same

instant they both saw—they both sped back in thought to their first meeting, to the hundred links of the chain that brought them to the present moment—they *knew*; and Millicent felt that they knew.

'Are *you* going to be married to-morrow?' asked Guy Osgard deliberately. He never was a man to whom a successful appeal for the slightest mitigation of justice could have been made. His dealings had ever been with men, from whom he had exacted as scrupulous an honour as he had given. He did not know that women are different—that honour is not their strong point.

Millicent did not answer. She looked to Meredith to answer for her; but Meredith was looking at Osgard, and in his lazy eyes there glowed the singular affection and admiration which he had bestowed long time before on this simple gentleman—his mental inferior.

'Are *you* going to be married to-morrow?' repeated Osgard, standing quite still, with a calmness that frightened her.

'Yes,' she answered rather feebly.

She knew that she could explain it all. She could have explained it to either of them separately, but to both together somehow it was difficult. Her mind was filled with clamouring arguments and explanations and plausible excuses; but she did not know which to select first. None of them seemed quite equal to this occasion. These men required something deeper, and stronger, and simpler than she had to offer them.

Moreover, she was paralysed by a feeling that was quite new to her—a horrid feeling that something had gone from her. She had lost her strongest, her single arm: her beauty. This seemed to have fallen from her. It seemed to count for nothing at this time. There is a time that comes as surely as death will come in the life of every beautiful woman—a time wherein she suddenly realises how trivial a thing her beauty is—how limited, how useless, how ineffectual!

Millicent Chyne made a little appealing movement towards Meredith, who relentlessly stepped back. It was the magic of the love that filled his heart for Osgard. Had she wronged any man in the world but Guy Osgard, that little movement—full of love and tenderness and sweet contrition—might have saved her. But it was Osgard's heart that she had broken; for broken they both knew it to be, and Jack Meredith stepped back from her touch as from pollution. His superficial, imagined love for her had

been killed at a single blow. Her beauty was no more to him at that moment than the beauty of a picture.

'Oh, Jack!' she gasped; and had there been another woman in the room that woman would have known that Millicent loved him with the love that comes once only. But men are not very acute in such matters—they either read wrong or not at all.

'It is all a mistake,' she said breathlessly, looking from one to the other.

'A most awkward mistake,' suggested Meredith with a cruel smile that made her wince.

'Mr. Oscar must have mistaken me altogether,' the girl went on, volubly addressing herself to Meredith—she wanted nothing from Oscar. 'I may have been silly, perhaps, or merely ignorant and blind. How was I to know that he meant what he said?'

'How, indeed?' agreed Meredith with a grave bow.

'Besides, he has no business to come here bringing false accusations against me. He has no right—it is cruel and ungentlemanly. He cannot prove anything; he cannot say that I ever distinctly gave him to understand—er, anything—that I ever promised to be engaged or anything like that.'

She turned upon Oscar, whose demeanour was stolid, almost dense. He looked very large and somewhat difficult to move.

'He has not attempted to do so yet,' suggested Jack suavely, looking at his friend.

'I do not see that it is quite a question of proofs,' said Oscar quietly, in a voice that did not sound like his at all. 'We are not in a court of justice, where ladies like to settle these questions now. If we were I could challenge you to produce my letters. There is no doubt of my meaning in them.'

'There are also my poor contributions to—your collection,' chimed in Jack Meredith. 'A comparison must have been interesting to you, by the same mail presumably, under the same postmark.'

'I made no comparison,' the girl cried defiantly. 'There was no question of comparison.'

She said it shamelessly, and it hurt Meredith more than it hurt Guy Oscar, for whom the sting was intended.

'Comparison or no comparison,' said Jack Meredith quickly, with the keenness of a good fencer who has been touched, 'there can be no doubt of the fact that you were engaged to us both

at the same time. You told us both to go out and make a fortune wherewith to buy—your affections. One can only presume that the highest bidder—the owner of the largest fortune—was to be the happy man. Unfortunately we became partners, and—such was the power of your fascination—we made the fortune; but we share and share alike in that. We are equal, so far as the—price is concerned. The situation is interesting and rather—amusing. It is your turn to move. We await your further instructions in considerable suspense.’

She stared at him with bloodless lips. She did not seem to understand what he was saying. At last she spoke, ignoring Guy Oscar’s presence altogether.

‘Considering that we are to be married to-morrow, I do not think that you should speak to me like that,’ she said with a strange, concentrated eagerness.

‘Pardon me, we are not going to be married to-morrow.’

Her brilliant teeth closed on her lower lip with a snap, and she stood looking at him, breathing so hard that the sound was almost a sob.

‘What do you mean?’ she whispered hoarsely.

He raised his shoulders in polite surprise at her dullness of comprehension.

‘In the unfortunate circumstances in which you are placed,’ he explained, ‘it seems to me that the least one can do is to offer every assistance in one’s power. Please consider me *hors de concours*. In a word—I scratch.’

She gasped like a swimmer swimming for life. She was fighting for that which some deem dearer than life—namely, her love. For it is not only the good women who love, though these understand it best and see farther into it.

‘Then you can never have cared for me,’ she cried. ‘All that you have told me,’ and her eyes flashed triumphantly across Oscar, ‘all that you promised and vowed was utterly false—if you turn against me at the first word of a man who was carried away by his own vanity into thinking things that he had no business to think.’

If Guy Oscar was no great adept at wordy warfare, he was at all events strong in his reception of punishment. He stood upright and quiescent, betraying by neither sign nor movement that her words could hurt him.

‘I beg to suggest again,’ said Jack composedly, ‘that Oscar

has not yet brought any accusations against you. You have brought them all yourself.'

'You are both cruel and cowardly,' she exclaimed, suddenly descending to vituperation. 'Two to one. Two men—*gentlemen*—against one defenceless girl. Of course I am not able to argue with you. Of course you can get the best of me. It is so easy to be sarcastic.'

'I do not imagine,' retorted Jack, 'that anything that we can say or do will have much permanent power of hurting you. For the last two years you have been engaged in an—intrigue such as a thin-skinned or sensitive person would hardly of her own free will undertake. You may be able to explain it to yourself—no doubt you are—but to our more limited comprehensions it must remain inexplicable. We can only judge from appearances.'

'And, of course, appearances go against me—they always do against a woman,' she cried rather brokenly.

'You would have been wise to have taken that peculiarity into consideration sooner,' replied Jack Meredith coldly. 'I admit that I am puzzled; I cannot quite get at your motive. Presumably it is one of those—*sweet* feminine inconsistencies which are so charming in books.'

There was a little pause. Jack Meredith waited politely to hear if she had anything further to say. His clean-cut face was quite pallid; the suppressed anger in his eyes was perhaps more difficult to meet than open fury. The man who never forgets himself before a woman is likely to be an absolute master of women.

'I think,' he added, 'that there is nothing more to be said.'

There was a dead silence. Millicent Chyne glanced towards Guy Osgard. He could have saved her yet—by a simple lie. Had he been an impossibly magnanimous man, such as one meets in books only, he could have explained that the mistake was all his, that she was quite right, that his own vanity had blinded him into a great and unwarranted presumption. But, unfortunately, he was only a human being—a man who was ready to give as full a measure as he exacted. The unfortunate mistake to which he clung was that the same sense of justice, the same code of honour, must serve for men and women alike. So Millicent Chyne looked in vain for that indulgence which is so inconsistently offered to women, merely because they are women—the indulgence which is sometimes given and sometimes withheld, according to the softness of the masculine heart and the beauty of the sup-

pliant feminine form. Guy Osgard was quite sure of his own impressions. This girl had allowed him to begin loving her, had encouraged him to go on, had led him to believe that his love was returned. And in his simple ignorance of the world he did not see why these matters should be locked up in his own breast from a mistaken sense of chivalry to be accorded where no chivalry was due.

'No,' he answered. 'There is nothing more to be said.'

Without looking towards her, Jack Meredith made a few steps towards the door—quietly, self-composedly, with that perfect *savoir-faire* of the social expert that made him different from other men. Millicent Chyne felt a sudden plebeian desire to scream. It was all so heartlessly well-bred. He turned on his heel with a little half-cynical bow.

'I leave my name with you,' he said. 'It is probable that you will be put to some inconvenience. I can only regret that this—*dénouement* did not come some months ago. You are likely to suffer more than I, because I do not care what the world thinks of me. Therefore you may tell the world what you choose about me—that I drink, that I gamble, that I am lacking in—honour! Anything that suggests itself to you, in fact. You need not go away; I will do that.'

She listened with compressed lips and heaving shoulders; and the bitterest drop in her cup was the knowledge that he despised her. During the last few minutes he had said and done nothing that lowered him in her estimation—that touched in any way her love for him. He had not lowered himself in any way, but he had suavely trodden her under foot. His last words—the inexorable intention of going away—sapped her last lingering hope. She could never regain even a tithe of his affection.

'I think,' he went on, 'that you will agree with me in thinking that Guy Osgard's name must be kept out of this entirely. I give you *carte blanche* except that.'

With a slight inclination of the head he walked to the door. It was characteristic of him that although he walked slowly he never turned his head nor paused.

Osgard followed him with the patient apathy of the large and mystified.

And so they left her—amidst the disorder of the half-unpacked wedding presents—amidst the ruin of her own life. Perhaps, after all, she was not wholly bad. Few people are; they are only bad enough to be wholly unsatisfactory and quite incomprehensible.

She must have known the risk she was running, and yet she could not stay her hand. She must have known long before that she really loved Jack Meredith, and that she was playing fast and loose with the happiness of her whole life. She knew that hundreds of girls around her were doing the same, and, with all shame be it mentioned, not a few married women. But they seemed to be able to carry it through without accident or hindrance. And illogically, thoughtlessly, she blamed her own ill-fortune.

She stood looking blankly at the door which had closed behind three men—one old and two young—and perhaps she realised the fact that such creatures may be led blindly, helplessly, with a single hair, but that that hair may snap at any moment.

She was not thinking of Guy Osgard. Him she had never loved. He had only been one of her experiments, and by his very simplicity—above all, by his uncompromising honesty—he had outwitted her.

It was characteristic of her that at that moment she scarcely knew the weight of her own remorse. It sat lightly on her shoulders then, and it was only later on, when her beauty began to fade, when years came and brought no joy for the middle-aged unmarried woman, that she began to realise what it was that she had to carry through life with her. At that moment a thousand other thoughts filled her mind—such thoughts as one would expect to find there. How was the world to be deceived? The guests would have to be put off—the wedding countermanded—the presents returned. And the world—her world—would laugh in its sleeve. There lay the sting.

CHAPTER XLII.

A STRONG FRIENDSHIP.

Still must the man move sadlier for the dreams
That mocked the boy.

'WHERE are you going?' asked Meredith, when they were in the street.

'Home.'

They walked on a few paces together.

'May I come with you?' asked Meredith again.

'Certainly; I have a good deal to tell you.'

They called a cab, and singularly enough they drove all the way to Russell Square without speaking. These two men had worked together for many months, and men who have a daily task in common usually learn to perform it without much interchange of observation. When one man gets to know the mind of another, conversation assumes a place of secondary importance. These two had been through more incidents together than usually fall to the lot of man—each knew how the other would act and think under given circumstances; each knew what the other was thinking now.

The house in Russell Square, the quiet house in the corner where the cabs do not pass, was lighted up and astir when they reached it. The old butler held open the door with a smile of welcome and a faint aroma of whisky. The luggage had been discreetly removed. Joseph had gone to Mr. Meredith's chambers. Guy Osgard led the way to the smoking-room at the back of the house—the room wherein the eccentric Osgard had written his great history—the room in which Victor Durnovo had first suggested the Simiacine scheme to the historian's son.

The two survivors of the originating trio passed into this room together, and closed the door behind them.

'The worst of one's own private tragedies is that they are usually only comedies in disguise,' said Jack Meredith oracularly.

Guy Osgard grunted. He was looking for his pipe.

'If we heard this of any two fellows except ourselves we should think it an excellent joke,' went on Meredith.

Osgard nodded. He lighted his pipe, and still he said nothing.

'Hang it!' exclaimed Jack Meredith, suddenly throwing himself back in his chair, 'it is a good joke.'

He laughed softly, and all the while his eyes, watchful, wise, anxious, were studying Guy Osgard's face.

'He is harder hit than I am,' he was reflecting. 'Poor old Osgard!'

The habit of self-suppression was so strong upon him—acquired as a mere social duty—that it was only natural for him to think less of himself than of the expediency of the moment. The social discipline is as powerful an agent as that military discipline that makes a man throw away his own life for the good of the many.

Osgard laughed, too, in a strangely staccato manner.

'It is rather a sudden change,' observed Meredith; 'and all brought about by your coming into that room at that particular moment—by accident.'

'Not by accident,' corrected Oscar, speaking at last. 'I was brought there and pushed into the room.'

'By whom?'

'By your father.'

Jack Meredith sat upright. He drew his curved hand slowly down over his face—keen and delicate as was his mind—his eyes deep with thought.

'The Guv'nor,' he said slowly. 'The Guv'nor—by God!'

He reflected for some seconds.

'Tell me how he did it,' he said curtly.

Oscar told him, rather incoherently, between the puffs. He did not attempt to make a story of it, but merely related the facts as they had happened to him. It is probable that to him the act was veiled which Jack saw quite distinctly.

'That is the sort of thing,' was Meredith's comment when the story was finished, 'that takes the conceit out of a fellow. I suppose I have more than my share. I suppose it is good for me to find that I am not so clever as I thought I was—that there are plenty of cleverer fellows about, and that one of them is an old man of seventy-nine. The worst of it is that he was right all along. He saw clearly where you and I were—damnably blind.'

He rubbed his slim brown hands together, and looked across at his companion with a smile wherein the youthful self-confidence was less discernible than of yore. The smile faded as he looked at Oscar. He was thinking that he looked older and graver—more of a middle-aged man who has left something behind him in life—and the sight reminded him of the few grey hairs that were above his own temples.

'Come,' he said more cheerfully, 'tell me your news. Let us change the subject. Let us throw aside light dalliance and return to questions of money. More important—much more satisfactory. I suppose you have left Durnovo in charge? Has Joseph come home with you?'

'Yes, Joseph has come home with me. Durnovo is dead.'

'Dead!'

Guy Oscar took his pipe from his lips.

'He died at Msala of the sleeping sickness. He was a bigger blackguard than we thought. He was a slave-dealer and a slave-owner. Those forty men we picked up at Msala were slaves belonging to him.'

'Ach!' It was a strange exclamation, as if he had burnt his

fingers. 'Who knows of this?' he asked immediately. The expediency of the moment had presented itself to his mind again.

'Only ourselves,' returned Osgard. 'You, Joseph, and I.'

'That is all right, and the sooner we forget that the better. It would be a dangerous story to tell.'

'So I concluded,' said Osgard, in his slow, thoughtful way. 'Joseph swears he won't breathe a word of it.'

Jack Meredith nodded. He looked rather pale beneath the light of the gas.

'Joseph is all right,' he said. 'Go on.'

'It was Joseph who found it out,' continued Osgard, 'up at the Plateau. I paraded the whole crowd, told them what I had found out, and chucked up the whole concern in your name and mine. Next morning I abandoned the Plateau with such men as cared to come. Nearly half of them stayed with Durnovo. I thought it was in order that they might share in the Simiacine—I told them they could have the whole confounded lot of the stuff. But it was not that; they tricked Durnovo there. They wanted to get him to themselves. In going down the river we had an accident with two of the boats, which necessitated staying at Msala. While we were waiting there, one night after ten o'clock the poor devil came, alone, in a canoe. They had simply cut him in slices—a most beastly sight. I wake up sometimes even now dreaming of it, and I am not a fanciful sort of fellow. Joseph went into his room and was simply sick; I didn't know that you could be made sick by anything you saw. The sleeping sickness was on Durnovo then; he had brought it with him from the Plateau. He died before morning.'

Osgard ceased speaking and returned to his pipe. Jack Meredith, looking haggard and worn, was leaning back in his chair.

'Poor devil!' he exclaimed. 'There was always something tragic about Durnovo. I did hate that man, Osgard! I hated him and all his works.'

'Well, he's gone to his account now.'

'Yes, but that does not make him any better a man while he was alive. Don't let us cant about him now. The man was an unmitigated scoundrel—perhaps he deserved all he got.'

'Perhaps he did. He was Marie's husband.'

'The devil he was.'

Meredith fell into a long reverie. He was thinking of Jocelyn

and her dislike for Durnovo, of the scene in the drawing-room of the bungalow at Loango; of a thousand incidents all connected with Jocelyn.

'How I hate that man!' he exclaimed at length. 'Thank God—he is dead—because I should have killed him.'

Guy Osgard looked at him with a slow pensive wonder. Perhaps he knew more than Jack Meredith knew himself of the thoughts that conceived those words—so out of place in that quiet room, from those suave and courtly lips.

All the emotions of his life seemed to be concentrated into this one day of Jack Meredith's existence. Osgard's presence was a comfort to him—the presence of a calm, strong man is better than many words.

'So this,' he said, 'is the end of the Simiacine. It did not look like a tragedy when we went into it.'

'So far as I am concerned,' replied Osgard with quiet determination, 'it certainly is the end of the Simiacine! I have had enough of it. I, for one, am not going to look for that Plateau again.'

'Nor I. I suppose it will be started as a limited liability company by a German in six months. Some of the natives will leave landmarks as they come down so as to find their way back.'

'I don't think so!'

'Why?'

Osgard took his pipe from his lips.

'When Durnovo came down to Msala,' he explained, 'he had the sleeping sickness on him. Where did he get it from?'

'By God!' ejaculated Jack Meredith, 'I never thought or that. He got it up at the Plateau. He left it behind him. They have got it up there now.'

'Not now—'

'What do you mean, Osgard?'

'Merely that all those fellows up there are dead. There is ninety thousand pounds' worth of Simiacine packed ready for carrying to the coast, standing in a pile on the Plateau, and there are thirty-four dead men keeping watch over it.'

'Is it as infectious as that?'

'When it first shows itself, infectious is not the word. It is nothing but a plague. Not one of those fellows can have escaped.'

Jack Meredith sat forward and rubbed his two hands pensively over his knees.

'So,' he said, 'only you and I and Joseph know where the Simiacine Plateau is.'

'That is so,' answered Osgard.

'And Joseph won't go back?'

'Not if you were to give him that ninety thousand pounds' worth of stuff.'

'And you will not go back?'

'Not for nine hundred thousand pounds. There is a curse on that place.'

'I believe there is,' said Meredith.

And such was the end of the great Simiacine Scheme—the wonder of a few seasons. Some day, when the Great Sahara is turned into an inland sea, when steamers shall ply where sand now flies before the desert wind, the Plateau may be found again. Some day, when Africa is cut from east to west by a railway line, some adventurous soul will scale the height of one of many mountains, one that seems no different from the rest and yet is held in awe by the phantom-haunted denizens of the gloomy forest, and there he will find a pyramid of wooden cases surrounded by bleached and scattered bones where vultures have fed.

In the meantime the precious drug will grow scarcer day by day, and the human race will be poorer by the loss of one of those half-matured discoveries which have more than once in the world's history been on the point of raising the animal called man to a higher, stronger, finer development of brain and muscle than we can conceive of under existing circumstances. Who can tell? Perhaps the strange solitary bush may be found growing elsewhere—in some other continent across the ocean. The ways of Nature are past comprehension, and no man can say who sows the seed that crops up in strange places. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and none can tell what germs it bears. It seems hardly credible that the Plateau, no bigger than a cricket field, far away in the waste land of Central Africa, can be the only spot on this planet where the magic leaf grows in sufficient profusion to supply suffering humanity with an alleviating drug, unrivalled—a strength-giving herb, unapproached in power. But as yet no other Simiacine has been found and the Plateau is lost.

And the end of it was two men who had gone to look for it two years before—young and hearty—returning from the search successful beyond their highest hopes, with a shadow in their eyes, and grey upon their heads.

They sat for nearly two hours in that room in the quiet house in Russell Square, where the cabs do not pass; and their conversation was of money. They sat until they had closed the Simiacine account, never to be reopened. They discussed the question of renouncement, and after due consideration concluded that the gain was rightly theirs seeing that the risk had all been theirs. Slaves and slave-owner had both taken their cause to a Higher Court, where the defendant has no worry and the plaintiff is at rest. They were beyond the reach of money—beyond the glitter of gold—far from the cry of anguish. A fortune was set aside for Marie Durnovo, to be held in trust for the children of the man who had found the Simiacine Plateau; another was apportioned to Joseph.

'Seventy-seven thousand one hundred and four pounds for you,' said Jack Meredith at length, laying aside his pen, 'seventy-seven thousand one hundred and four pounds for me.'

'And,' he added after a little pause, 'it was not worth it.'

Guy Osgard smoked his pipe and shook his head.

'Now,' said Jack Meredith, 'I must go. I must be out of London by to-morrow morning. I shall go abroad—America or somewhere.'

He rose as he spoke, and Osgard made no attempt to restrain him.

They went out into the passage together. Osgard opened the door and followed his companion to the step.

'I suppose,' said Meredith, 'we shall meet some time—somewhere?'

'Yes.'

They shook hands.

Jack Meredith went down the steps almost reluctantly. At the foot of the short flight he turned and looked up at the strong, peaceful form of his friend.

'What will you do?' he said.

'I shall go back to my big game,' replied Guy Osgard. 'I am best at that. But I shall not go to Africa.'

(To be continued.)

